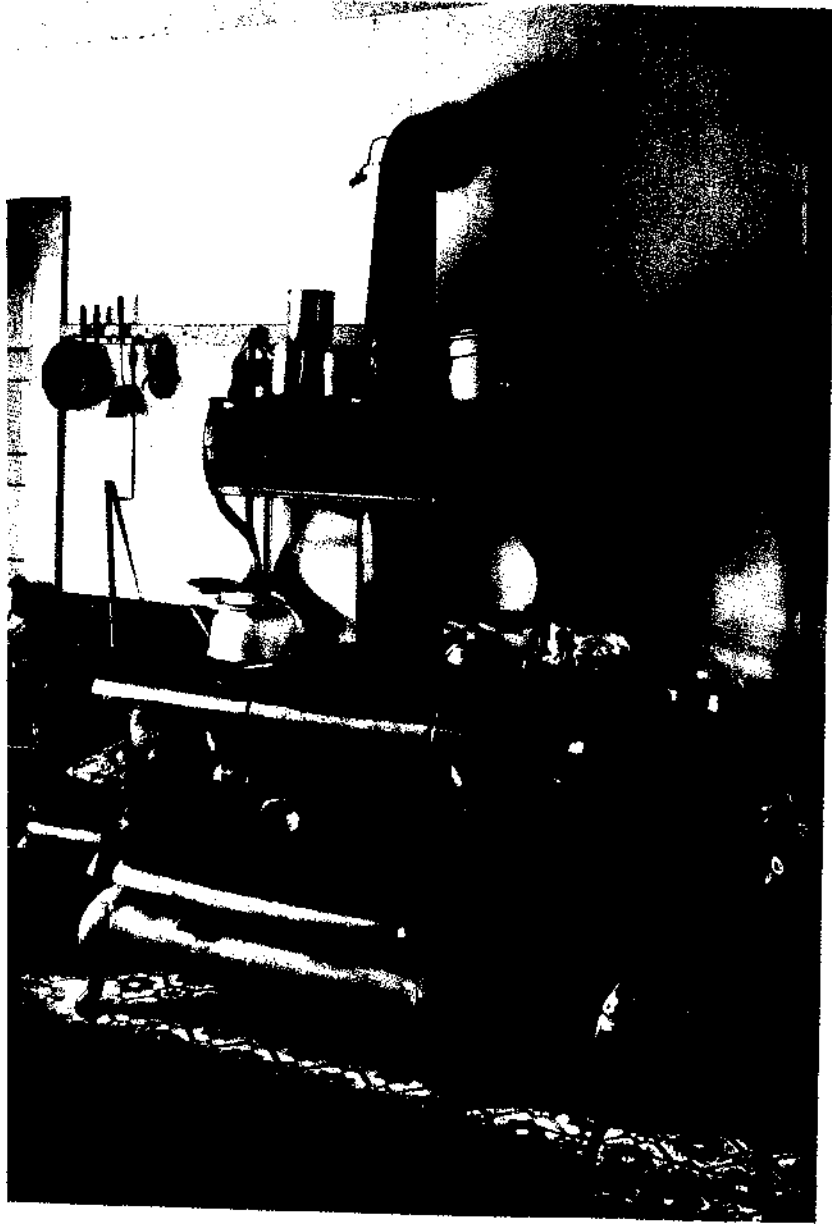


North Point Press *San Francisco 1990*

Our Sustainable Table

Edited by Robert Clark

for The Journal of Gastronomy

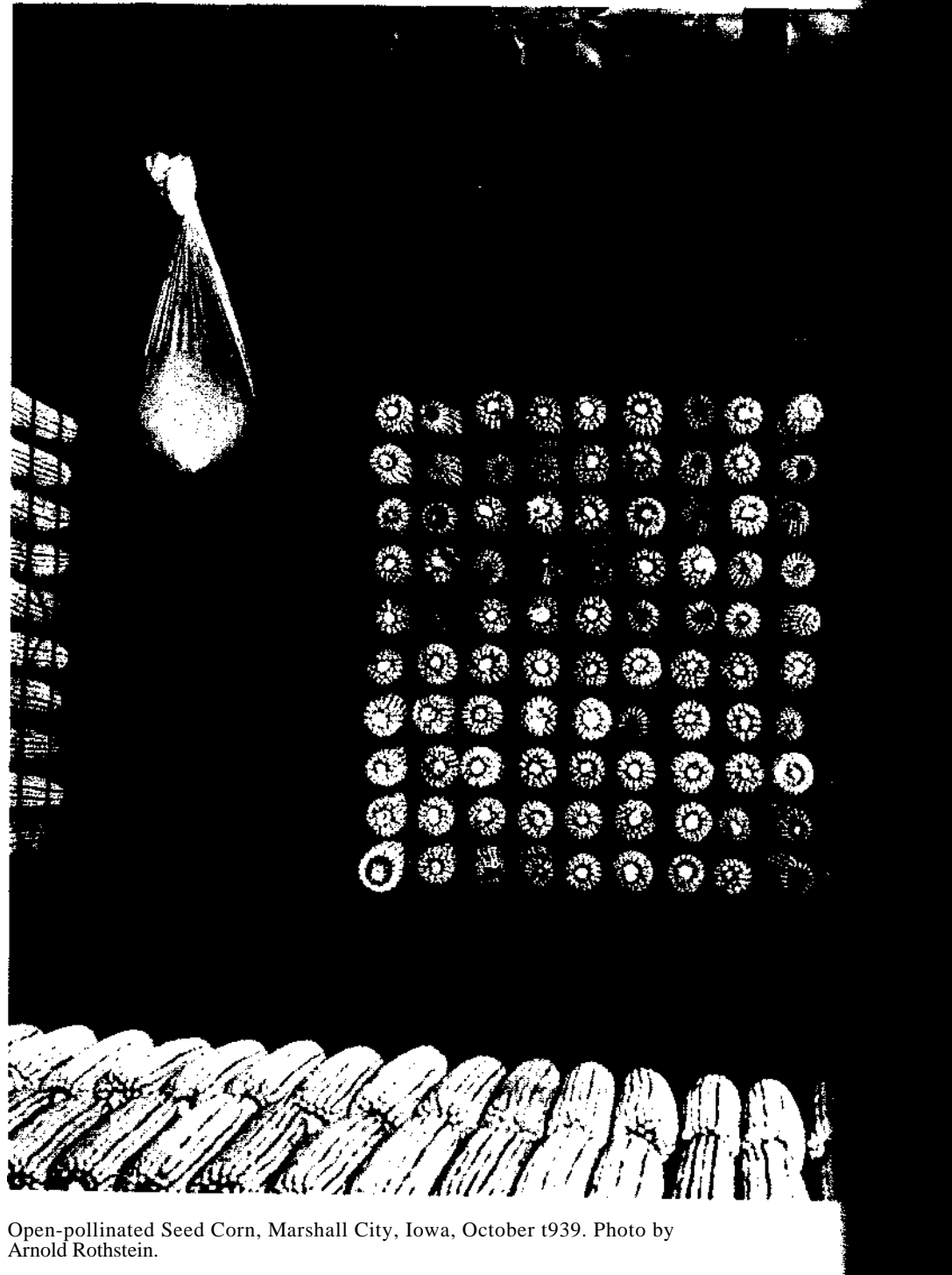


Food, Farming, and Democracy

Frances Moore Lappé

A bumper sticker appeared midway through the farm crisis of the 1980s that said, "If you eat, you're involved in agriculture." It seems an uncontroversial proposition: Food comes from farms; all of us need food; therefore, we all have an interest in farming. It's nevertheless a connection that most of us have difficulty making. Farmers look increasingly like yet one more special-interest group. Despite what we may rationally know, our daily experience tells us that food comes from a supermarket. We are removed, physically and psychologically, from the farm. At the same time, as consumers we seem to be growing more and more dissatisfied with our food: We worry about its purity, wholesomeness, and healthfulness; we are disappointed with its flavor and quality; and we sense that mealtimes—the experience of preparing and sharing food—seem to lack the feeling of hearth and home, of family and community, that they once had, or that we imagine they once had.

So perhaps it's not surprising that, as a society, we seem unable to resolve either our farm crisis—a crisis that has arguably been continuous since the 1930s—or our dissatisfaction with our food. We don't really see the connection between the two, and so are unable to develop what must be an integrated solution to what is really one problem. Our imaginations and ability to create solutions are therefore impaired: We cannot move toward a future we cannot imagine, and we cannot imagine a future we don't believe is possible. The aim of this essay is to ask each of us to search our hearts and our minds in order to discover a vision of food and farming we *can* believe in—one we can believe in because **it faces** and embraces the practical and logical



Open-pollinated Seed Corn, Marshall City, Iowa, October 1939. Photo by Arnold Rothstein.

consequences of what both our deepest intuitions and our most unrelenting analyses tell us. But wishful thinking is the opposite of what I mean by "imagining a future." Rather, we must in our mind's eye be able to see a system of food production and consumption here in the United States that could genuinely work for the people and for the land—not just on a few oddball farms but on all farms—a system that is environmentally, economically, and culturally sustainable as well as genuinely democratic. Such a vision must begin with the principle of a sustainable agriculture, an agriculture consistent with the long-term well-being of both people and the land.

Powerful cultural messages, however, form and deform our view of what is possible. Take the "family farm:" a term that already has a quaint ring to it and is surely taken seriously only by those who are out of step. Those who believe in the family farm may be right in some moral sense, but progress does not stop for the sentimental. When, four years ago, liberal farm analysts Susan Sechler and Ken Cook wrote an influential article under the title "It's Time to Face the Facts: The Family Farm Is Doomed;" they were just stating the obvious in the eyes of most Americans' Still, most of us continue to give lip service to the notion of the family farm, to the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian America. But few of us have a glimmering of the real social, economic, and political context in which such an agriculture and such a society could flourish. We are prevented from imagining a workable framework for these things because, in my view, they would — by definition — require a democratic economy. The historian Lawrence Goodwyn wrote: "We have two languages, one rooted in Adam Smith and one rooted in Karl Marx. Neither provides a theory of the democratic state. . . . You can't create a society you can't imagine. And if you can't imagine a democratic society, you can't have one."²

I believe Goodwyn is right. We have no language with which to conceive of a democratic society or agriculture. But our biggest stumbling block may be that we have been made to believe that we don't need to conceive of one. "Free-market" agriculture is *by definition* a democratic agriculture, isn't it? They are one and the same. With this view, we needn't bother

ourselves with imagining and then creating a democratic economy. By "free-market" agriculture I mean an economy driven by an exchange of commodities, including farmland and labor, based on market prices. I mean an economy not just based on private property but one allowing unlimited individual accumulation of even the scarcest resources. I mean an economy in which labor and ownership are almost universally distinct. While we associate these rules with a democratic economy, they are, especially in agriculture, inadequate tools.

Left to its own devices, the market leads to concentration of control. In agriculture, this reality has special significance. Because industry and trade (compared to farming) lend themselves more readily to concentration, farmers today find they are squeezed between two highly organized sectors—what economists call "oligopolistic" industries. On one side are the manufacturers of farm supplies and equipment, from pesticides to combines, along with the banking industry. On the other are the trade and processing industries. In each, a handful of companies command the field.

Such oligopolies can pass on their increased costs to customers, including farmers, thus assuring themselves a profit. But farmers have to swallow increased costs—especially those farmers not big enough to skirt the market through bulk discount buying and other devices. And they have to take whatever price traders and processors offer. Farmers who want to remain competitive cannot pass on their increased costs by hiking their prices.

Thus, where the market governs, it's not surprising that an imbalance in power (and therefore in reward) develops between primary food producers and industrial behemoths. But the problem with the market is not just that such gross inequities allow some to protect their profits at the expense of others. The problem is the price mechanism itself. Price is the only information the market offers, and it is grossly deficient. Commodity prices, to which all producers in a market must respond to stay in business, do not incorporate the true *resource* or *human* costs of production. Nor do prices include the cost of (and therefore alert us to) the erosion of topsoil or the drawing down of *Ili*

groundwater reserves. Neither do they reflect the difficulties passed to later generations who must grow food on impoverished soil with depleted groundwater. In the "free" market, what nature makes has no price. It is "free."

Closely related prices of farm inputs—fertilizers, pesticides, machinery—also send farmers false signals. The market says: Any machine that increases income this year is a good deal. The market cannot warn farmers that the choice may be generating a dependency that will threaten their economic survival when their neighbors buy the same machine, pushing production up and commodity prices down. Neither can the market inform farmers that their choice of certain inputs may heighten their risk of contracting our most deadly forms of cancer.

There is yet another problem with price as the measure of the health of farming. Prices of commodities tell us nothing about whose pockets ultimately get lined from the farmers' labor. Commodity prices multiplied by volume make up gross farm sales, not what farmers actually get to keep. Since 1940, adjusted for inflation, the *gross* income of the farming sector taken as a whole has doubled, largely because of vast increases in volume.³ At the same time, net income from farming has fallen by 10 percent. In other words, more than the equivalent of the entire increase in income to farmers since 1940 has gone *not to farmers* themselves but to manufacturers of farm supplies and to banks. Commodity prices and farm output really tell us little about what the farming sector ultimately ends up with. And, within the farm sector, three-fourths of net farm income ends up in the hands of a mere 5 percent of farmers.

My point is simple: The market price simply cannot provide the information needed to protect both the land and the people who farm it. It ignores vital information—the costs to land, soil, and human health—on which our ultimate survival depends. It is blind to other critical questions: whether gross returns from farm sales actually remain on the farm and, a parallel question within the farm sector, which farmers (a few or the vast majority?) enjoy the gains from greater volume or better prices.

The market and its prices might play a constructive role were it not for the second rule of the market economy that ,)

undermines sustainable agriculture: Capitalism divides ownership from work. In 1986, almost 40 percent of farmland sales went to city investors such as doctors and lawyers, doubling their typical share of the farmland market.⁴ As a speculative commodity, wealth—not land wisdom—becomes the criterion for ownership. Farmland ownership is thus severed from the culture of agriculture, from the body of knowledge and skills that grows out of generations on the land.

In a market economy, labor is strictly a commodity as well. Farmland has increasingly become the domain of the wealthy; by the 1980s, for the first time in American history, most of the work on farms was being done by hired labor. Agriculture dependent on hired labor belies the vision of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is necessarily knowledge-intensive, depending on *all* the faculties of the farmer. Since sustainable agriculture consists of a mix of crops together with livestock, farmers must understand the many interrelations of their chosen mix to enrich the soil and minimize pest damage.

In short, sustainable agriculture depends on a specific type of relationship of the farmer to the land. It must be an enduring one, for only over time can the necessary knowledge be acquired. And the farmer must feel a personal stake in the welfare of the land to call forth not just the physical exertion required but also the mental alertness needed to observe and record subtle changes and interactions over decades. Such a relationship is incompatible with farm labor as a commodity and with farm ownership as an investment. Price—the compelling determinant in market relationships—is a wholly insufficient and often misleading guide to land use or indicator of a fair return to most farmers. And land and labor treated as mere commodities necessarily dissociate agriculture from the culture that sustains it. By contrast, a democratic agriculture would depend in large measure on a set of noneconomic relationships, on rules and values in direct conflict with those economic relationships just described.

In a sustainable agriculture, which rules and values would hold? For one, land is not an investment, returning income by virtue of inflation to an owner who does nothing. Land is a *tool*

with which to earn a living by working it well. Land, however, is not a tool *exclusively*: It has value in and of itself. Because of its intrinsic worth and its value to unborn generations, a farmer seeks not to maximize output from the land but to leave the land "more valuable at the end of his life than it was when he took hold of it," in Theodore Roosevelt's words.⁵ And, in a sustainable agriculture, land is not just a place to live, interchangeable within any urban site. It is a locus of enriched family life because, almost uniquely in today's world, it offers the possibility of shared economic responsibilities within the family.

Thus, over the life of our nation, to the degree that our farmers have embodied (or imagined themselves to embody) any of these values, they have never fit the market model. To some degree, the culture of agriculture has always been a culture apart from its economic structure. Little by little, however, the fit has gotten better and better. Farmers and nonfarmers alike have watched as capitalist economic rules have steadily eroded the very essence of family-farm agriculture—dispersed, diversified, family-owned-and-operated farming. We have watched the values underpinning that culture increasingly violated: our sense of the sacred desecrated as topsoil is lost and groundwater contaminated; our sense of justice trampled as the most economically powerful, rather than the most conscientious or hardworking, reap the biggest rewards; our sense of caring for each other—love itself—devalued as we are asked to accept our neighbor's demise. It's just the market's discipline at work weeding out the inefficient, we're told. It might hurt, but, in the end, it's good for us all. With this understanding, it's easier to see why farming in America, along with its satisfactions, has been a plain of conflict, disappointment, and pain for so many.

Much of this we all know. But, as shoppers, cooks, and partakers of food, we labor under the same assumptions about the market economy and its benefits as we do about agriculture—assumptions that blind us not only to the real problems of food producers but also to our own plight as food consumers. As in agriculture, price dominates all discussion of food consumption. Since 1945 and the beginnings of "agribusiness," the American

experience of food and eating has been largely quantitative rather than qualitative. We point with pride to how little of our income we spend on food, how much we produce, and how little time we spend preparing or eating it. If flavor, purity, and the psychological and social satisfactions of food disappear in the process, that must be weighed against the clear economic miracle that is the system of contemporary American food production and consumption. It is, we are told, surely a small price to pay. As of 1987, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Americans spent less than 10 percent of their disposable income on food—a record. I want to suggest that in fact the price we pay is very high indeed—that in fact we pay dearly as individuals and as a society for the way in which we presently produce and consume food.

We have already seen how our food production system harms all but the largest farms and how it damages our environment, our land, and our rural communities. Cheap food has been made possible at the farmer's expense, not at the expense of the food processor or distributor, who receives 75 percent of every dollar spent on food.⁶ The economic miracle of today's cheap American food has involved a colossal transfer of income and capital from producers to middlemen—to the agricultural equivalents of Wall Street arbitrageurs and bond sellers. In the third world, large plantations of cash crops grown for export by multinationals or local elites tend to reinforce both the concentration of land and wealth in a few hands and the continuing powerlessness of ordinary people. Displacing the variety of crops necessary to sustain the local population, monocultures of fruit and vegetables grown for the out-of-season market in America ensure that we will not go without cheap and varied food year-round. But they also increase the wealth of elite landholders, providing the wherewithal for their further expansion. And our appetite for meat—meat that we don't need and that may in fact be harming our health—contributes not only to the overproduction of feed grain at the expense of other crops but also to the conversion of rain forest to grazing land and thus to global warming.

Even if we choose to ignore the effects of our food production

system on others, we ourselves pay for it in ways that most of us can only begin to comprehend. In our supposedly cheap food are hidden costs that we pay for once as consumers and then again as taxpayers. Our tax dollars not only pay for agricultural subsidies (which, like virtually everything else in contemporary agribusiness, benefit the wealthiest the most) but also provide irrigation water and energy at unconscionable discounts to large growers. We also fund the USDA and the land-grant college system, agencies originally designed to support all farmers but that now dedicate their energies almost exclusively to aiding large agribusiness operations. And even those government entities explicitly set up to protect and help us as consumers seem reluctant to pursue any course that goes against the interest of big agriculture and food processing: In the recent outcry over Alar, for example, government has been the *last* to act, following well on the heels of the apple industry and Alar's manufacturer. In a price-fixated, market-driven food and farming system, the government seems unable or unwilling to deal with consumer concerns about food safety and purity.

There are other, perhaps less dramatic, costs. The flavor of our food has suffered as a result of varieties developed not for their inherent aesthetic qualities but for the convenience of growers, distributors, and processors. And, next to cost, we have been sold on convenience as the highest virtue. The value of the fast food most of us eat away from home or the convenience food we heat or microwave in our own kitchens lies almost entirely in its convenience, its uniformity, and its capacity to save us time—time presumably to be spent earning more money or buying more consumer goods. Since human beings are adaptable creatures, we become convinced that tomatoes in February really are worth eating, that heating processed food in a microwave oven is cooking, and that fast-food and chain restaurants are an adequate substitute for the pleasure, community, and solace that traditional restaurant and family meals once gave us. This aesthetic desensitization also assists in distancing us yet further from the realities of where and how our food is produced. And so, in the market economy, the process comes full circle. We are its perpetrators and simultaneously its victims.

Why, it must be asked, do we accept these trends—trends that even you who do not accept my analysis of their relation to the market economy might still find unsatisfactory from so many points of view? Could it be because of a belief system that we ourselves already hold? I believe the answer, unfortunately, is yes. It is a belief system that allows us to avoid admitting the many obvious ways in which the market violates our deepest values. As long as we cannot admit, or even see, how the market/commodity rules violate us, we will lack the motivation and courage to resist.

We avoid seeing or admitting the impact of market economy through a mental packaging of our ideas about ourselves. The essential trick is believing that we are each really two people—one "moral" and one "economic." And entirely different rules apply to these two different entities within. Let's take our "economic self" first. For two hundred years, Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and a distorted version of Adam Smith's economic philosophy have been used to teach us that by nature we are cold, calculating economic rationalists, weighing every choice in relation to how it furthers our narrow self-interest.

In the last decade, the emerging field of sociobiology—pioneered by E. O. Wilson's study of the biological determinants of human social behavior—has been misread to entrench this view of ourselves. The notion of a "selfish gene" (from Richard Dawkins's 1976 book by that title) has further reinforced the notion of individuals as calculating atoms, each out for its own good. And biotechnology, with its capacity to "invent" and now patent new life, has further diminished our view of ourselves. Such a self-image melds perfectly with the market metaphor of free-ranging economic entities wheeling and dealing in purely economic exchanges. So, while our religious leaders often warn that our problem is hubris, that we mortals have an overly exalted sense of ourselves, I fear an opposite problem. We have an increasingly *dismal view* of ourselves. As an "economic self," one is simply an instinct-driven, self-interested collection of genes. It's worth noting that such a view of life is relatively new. Marshall Sahlins, author of *The Use and Abuse of Biology*, has written: "So far as I am aware, we are the only society that

thinks of itself as having risen from savagery, identified with a ruthless nature. Everyone else believes they are descended from gods:"

On the other hand, opposed to this economic self, many Americans still cling to a belief in a "moral self?" Even if not churchgoers, most Americans report that they believe in God and in religious virtues. Therefore, if pressed, most of us would no doubt proclaim a belief in the possibility of unselfish love, fellow feeling, and cooperation. But my point is that such a view of ourselves, if it exists at all, exists in increasing subordination to that of the "economic self?" Human beings seek internal consistency. It's exceedingly difficult to maintain the notion that we are "moral beings" on Sunday and when we put the kids to bed at night but are "economic beings" the rest of the week. Seeking unity, we let the "economic self" increasingly define our entirety.

I see evidence of this progression all around. While renting out one's body for another's sexual pleasure has always seemed aberrant—reducing intimacy to an economic exchange—relatively few people today are speaking out against a much greater affront to our internal unity: so-called surrogate motherhood. Is it not because the renting of wombs and the selling of infants become perfectly consistent once we have become an "economic self"? So now I have a tentative answer to my earlier question: Why do we tolerate rules of economic life that violate our sense of the sacred, of justice, of love itself? Because, perhaps, in our hearts we seriously doubt that these rules do in fact violate our nature at all. We've come to believe that the commodity/market system, rather than violating our nature, handily conforms to, or even reflects, our dominant nature.

That is the problem. Capitalist rules belie a sustainable agriculture and run roughshod over values long associated with family-farm agriculture—rules we tolerate despite the fact that they violate our deepest beliefs. Similarly, those same rules play havoc with the wholesomeness and pleasure we ought to expect from our food. We experience ourselves as two people—as a walking, talking dualism. Since our feeling, caring selves can't be heard above the dominant voice of our economic selves, we come to belittle the violation of our values. If an "economic ;)

being" is who we *really are*, we lack the conviction to withstand the intimidation of those who defend the market rules regardless of their impact. We lack courage. We acquiesce.

How can we resolve our imagined dualism driven by our "economic selves"? I'll make only a few suggestions. Our religious traditions surely offer guidance. Unfortunately, however, for many people institutional religion has reinforced the notion that economic life and moral life are separate realms. And the recent debacle of TV evangelists only illustrates the startling degree to which religion has been taken over by economic values. In contrast, the Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on the American economy, "Economic Justice for All," and comparable teachings now emerging from the Protestant churches reverse that trend. Theirs are courageous calls for a rejection of the "economic self" and a reunification of ourselves from the other direction, by infusing moral values into economic life.

We can buttress these initiatives. We can, in addition, reclaim a philosophic heritage long denied us. Today Adam Smith's authority is used to confirm our selfish nature. We hear only of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, that famous 1776 treatise proposing that our self-interest operates as an "invisible hand" to the benefit of all. Forgotten is Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in which he argues that human behavior is grounded in an *innate* morality. The work begins: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."⁸ Adam Smith saw no dualism. We are *social* by our very nature. He wrote, "It is thus that man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made."⁹ We cannot escape our concern for the well-being of others.

Just as Adam Smith's wisdom has been consistently reduced to reinforce the notion of the narrow "economic self," so Charles Darwin's work has been misused to teach false lessons about our competitive, selfish nature. Didn't Darwin believe we all evolved *in a dog-eat-dog world* where "survival of the fittest" was the unpleasant truth pushing evolution along? Overlooked has been

Darwin's insight that natural selection favored altruism, cooperation, and mutual aid. Darwin wrote: "As man advances in civilization and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instinct and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him."¹⁰

Interpretations of modern sociobiology assume that this new theory just takes Darwin one step further, arguing that it is the *gene*, not the particular organism, that must perpetuate itself in order for evolution to make sense. What is missed is a profound irony: "Selfish" genes create "unselfish" entities. Because, for genes to survive, the organisms of which they are a part must serve the survival not just of themselves but also of all other entities with the same genes. Such theories can begin to explain the cooperation and self-sacrifice found throughout nature and through human evolution. They help us understand how such behaviors could predate formal social rules imposing cooperation from the outside or even predate what Darwin called the "simplest reason?" Thus, even modern-day sociobiology—the bane of many humanists—actually suggests a biological, genetic basis for fellow feeling and altruism, one on which (it could be argued) culture can build ever broader circles of caring to include more and more of our cohabitants on this small planet.¹¹

I have taken this excursion not, of course, to try to convince you that human beings by nature have a great capacity for caring and selflessness. Rather, I have tried to point out that we live in a culture deeply imbued with the opposite view of our nature, a dualistic view in which the economic self rules. My contention is this: Only as we leave behind this false notion of the "economic self" will we be able to critique and resist economic rules that violate our deepest intuitions about our most basic human values and needs, including the three I mentioned earlier: our need to cherish the sacred (including our land), our need for fairness as the very basis of community, and our need for love expressed in solidarity with our neighbors. More than acquirers, we are creators, developers of our unique capacities. More than isolated egos, we are social beings in search of meaningful communities. This is our essence.

From such a vantage point, we can look afresh at received economic dogma. We are free to view the market and private property, not as the be-all and end-all, not as the definition of democratic economic life, but simply as what they are: devices that we can *use* to create economies serving healthy, satisfying communities. Understanding human beings as developers of innate gifts, we can place emphasis in a democratic agricultural economy not on maximum acquisition but on maximum opportunity. Such an agricultural economy seeks to enable as many people as possible to apply their talents to farming. A farm economy reflecting such a view of our nature and responding to the values I have outlined might set these parameters: First, farmers alone own farmland—not bankers, insurance companies, or landlords. This is possible only if farmers are able to pay for farmland solely with the income they earn from farming it. And this is possible only if farmers in each new generation must pay for the land by farming it. In such a vision, the market and private property do have roles to play: determining roles, not supportive ones. They are seen not as values in themselves but as devices in the service of moral values.

Movement toward a democratic agriculture is impossible without making both commodity prices and property transfers serve social goals. Thomas Jefferson desired that land be returned to a common pool for reselling after the death of the farmer. Not many societies have tried this solution, but many have taken farmland out of the market (that is, farmland could be passed on but not sold). In countries as different as China and large parts of rural Mexico, this is true today. In Sweden, local boards must approve farmland sales, ensuring that prices remain within the reach of farmers and that sales go to make more viable farms, not simply to enlarge the already profitable ones. Also in Sweden, only farmers can own farmland. In two of Asia's more successful economies, similar rules have made farmland no longer a mere commodity: In Taiwan and in South Korea, absentee ownership of farmland is not permitted. Sweden has also taken wholesale prices of agricultural commodities out of the market in order to provide the price stability on which family farming hinges. Commodity prices are determined when

farmers' representatives sit down periodically with representatives from government, industry, and consumer cooperatives. Retail food prices, on the other hand, are set by the market except for certain essential foods like bread and milk, which are subsidized.

These brief examples illustrate a variety of approaches to the problem of injustices that the market system perpetrates on competitive producers when other sectors are highly concentrated, as well as injustices *within* agriculture that exist as long as farmland remains a speculative commodity. You'll notice that virtually all my examples are in countries that most Americans would call capitalist. Most have not done away with the market or with private property. What they *have* done is to reduce these absolutes of capitalism into flexible mechanisms, limited so as to protect democratic goals ¹²

These solutions to the problems of farming have positive ramifications for food consumers, too. Farmers freed from pressure to produce maximum volume in order to counter price fluctuations can concentrate more on the quality and wholesomeness of their crops. And, in a farm economy in which there is once again room for the family farmer, there is also room for more variety and diversity in what is grown and how it is marketed and sold. Consumers can thus enjoy what ought to be a wider range of more flavorful and more wholesome food. At the same time, restoring and protecting the local farm economy will allow us to revive local food sources and markets that have long disappeared under the tidal wave of supermarkets and chain restaurants, and to renew local and regional food traditions and flavors that can reawaken the pleasure and community once central to the table.

I firmly believe that so long as we define the problem of food and farming in narrow market terms—as, for example, simply increasing commodity prices, enhancing efficiency or convenience, or lowering consumer costs—we cannot envision a democratic system of food production and use in this society. Price itself is a misleading guide, and fairer prices themselves cannot address the property relations that determine the winners and losers resulting from a price increase. In fact, the vision that I am suggesting is not at base a set of market relationships at

all. It is a set of ethical choices about what best serves our needs—what is fair to people and fair to the land.

Some will respond that you cannot talk to farmers about anything but the market and how to ensure that it brings them better prices. But my sense is that farmers are not unlike the rest of us. They know in their hearts that the current rules, built on a concept of an economic self with narrow economic interests, are not working. And those who have been around for a while know that farming is not just about economics. This is what many farmers are trying to tell us. If they had wanted to get rich, most would have chosen a different livelihood to begin with. The noneconomic values drew family farmers to their work in the first place and keep them there, sometimes against impossible odds.

Similarly, we are told that, for consumers, price, convenience, and appearance are everything. But everywhere there is evidence to the contrary. Survey after survey shows that Americans not only are concerned about the purity and wholesomeness of their food but also are willing to pay more than they do now to guarantee them. And the growing popularity of direct farmer-to-consumer marketing, witnessed by farmer's markets and roadside stands, shows that those same consumers are interested in where their food comes from and in the people who produce it. Increasingly, the connection between farmer and consumer *is* being restored, benefiting communities and the economy as well as being socially and aesthetically satisfying. Finally, at all levels of society—not just the wealthiest—people are interested in their food: in its provenance, its flavor, and its place in both their personal well-being and that of the community and the environment as a whole.

In spite of this, many continue to conclude that family farmers are quaint relics of the past. I conclude the opposite. In their protests, they articulate that what they are losing is what most Americans want, too: a way of life in which economic viability is only a vehicle, not an end in itself. The end is a life centered in family and community relationships and in responsible stewardship of that which ultimately belongs to none of us—the land itself. Clearly, consumers are expressing the same concerns

and desires. In both cases, media, opinion leaders, and government seem not to have caught up yet with what is a flourishing, if often unarticulated, consensus.

My challenge is simply to ask you to be willing to consider that sustainable agriculture and a sustainable culture in which food—as it must be—is central are not just about terraces and hedgerows or supermarkets and recipes. But to do so, we must ultimately confront the most widely held assumptions about our very nature. Relying on our intuitive mistrust of those who would reduce human beings to their "economic selves;" we can overcome our fear of taking on economic dogma. No longer intimidated, we can not only confront the injustices that a concentrated market economy brings down on competitive producers; we can also address how market relations themselves, used exclusively to assign value and define opportunity, undermine our vision of a democratic economy. As Thomas Jefferson argued, every generation is responsible anew for its governance. In facing this challenge to ourselves, I leave you with the words of philosopher Lewis Mumford:

Our main handicap will be lack of imagination. . . . This is one of those times when only the dreamers will turn out to be practical men.

Notes

1. Susan Sechler and Ken Cook, "It's Time to Face the Facts: The Family Farm Is Doomed," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (Feb. II, 1985), p. 13.
- z. Personal communication to the author. Goodwyn wrote *The Populist Moment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
3. Statistics in this and the following paragraphs are from U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Economic Indicators of the Farm Sector," *National Financial Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 13-14.
4. Marj Charlier, "More Young Farmers Rent Land They Till, Often to Avoid Debt," *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 3, 1987).
5. Quoted in Roderick Nash, *The American Environment: Readings in the History of Conservation* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1976), p. 5x.
6. Food Marketing Institute, "Food Marketing Facts" (Washington, D.C., 1988).
7. Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), p. 100..
8. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* x, (Edinburgh: Hay, 1813), p. I.
9. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 194.
10. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Appleton, 1909), chap. 4.
- xr. This discussion benefits from the insights of environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. See, for example, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1989).
- xz. The preceding section benefits especially from the work of Marty Strange of the Center for Rural Affairs whose recent book is *Family Farming: A New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1988).