

# A CALL TO FARMS

WOODY TASCH

From the Russian Revolution to the Green Revolution, from the War to End All Wars to the War on Poverty, our quivers are full of industrial-strength, 20th-century arrows that can't quite hit the bull's-eye in the Age of Greta. Maybe it's because we're shooting at the wrong target.

"If the lad or lass is among us who knows where the secret heart of this Growth Monster is hidden," writes poet Gary Snyder, referring to the global economy's pursuit of unlimited growth, "let them please tell us where to shoot the arrow that will slow it down."

The crazy-good news is that many, many such lads and lasses are, indeed, among us, living near and far. Eliot Coleman, Zoe Bradbury, Karen Washington, Will Harris, Ann Cure, Jill and Eric Skokan, Evan Mallett, Dan James, Linley Dixon, Jean-Martin Fortier, Shi Yan and (Shared Harvest outside Beijing), Pat's Pastured, Wild Plum Café, Organic Valley, Hawthorne Valley, Organically Grown Company, Veritable Vegetables, Red Tomato, Our Table Cooperative, Central Grazing Company, Terre de Liens, Food Connect Brisbane, Savory Institute, Real Organic Project, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Farm Fresh RI, (Citytree Tel Aviv), Farmworks Investment Co-op in Nova Scotia, Swanton Berry Farm, Full Belly Farm, MijnStadstuin (MyUrbanGarden Amsterdam), Thirteen Mile Lamb & Wool Company, Soul Fire Farm, Lucky Penny Farm, Butterworks Farm—trying to name all these farmers and food entrepreneurs in one place would be as silly as the idea of an institutional investment fund targeting them, aiming to generate competitive returns for distant investors.

If we've had trouble learning this hitherto, let us learn it now. With respect to many commercial enterprises that are foundational to our well-being, our sense of purpose and our sense of belonging, the returns that must come first in the 21st century are the returns to soil and air and water and community, here, in the places where we live. Such returns are not delivered by cyber heroes offering buckets of virtual gold. They are brought to us by those who put their hands into the soil—the actual soil and the soil of the local economy.

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Nell Newman knows. That's why she used to tell her dad, "In life, we need to be more like the farmer who puts back into the soil what he takes out." Newman's Own charted a way forward in the postmodern economic journey by dedicating 100% of profits to charity. They've given away \$570 million since 1982. In a much, much smaller way, but no less holistic in intention, local volunteer-led slow money SOIL groups have recently begun giving 0% loans to organic farmers and food businesses. "I've never had this much fun doing anything that involves money," said Jason Griffiths of Aspen Moon Farm as he left the room where 40 folks had just approved his \$30,000 0% loan. There may be nothing more wonderfully, apolitically, radically constructive, and hopeful than the fact that we all knew what Jason meant by fun. His smile was lively serious. For a few moments, we shared glimpses of nurture capital, although we did not yet know it by name.

Before you dismiss such talk, in this time of global wheat supplies disrupted by war, as the musings of someone who has eaten at too many farm-to-table restaurants for his own good, consider this: A well-run, small, diversified organic farm can generate \$50,000 or more per acre in revenue, while industrial monocultures of grain grown in multi-thousand-acre swaths generate something like \$1,000 per acre in revenues from their commodity crop. Small is not only beautiful; it can also be extremely productive. But let's zoom out from the numbers as quickly as we zoomed in, because there are many ins and outs to them, and the numbers tell only a part of the story. The rest will be told by the growing number of folks who know in their hearts that we can never bomb our way to peace, any more than we can manufacture soil fertility in a petri dish or financially engineer our way to mutuality and trust.

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