

Young Agrarians Resource Guide

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Young Agrarians—Changing the Face of Agriculture

In communities across the nation, there is growing interest in developing and supporting local food economies. Consider that the food we consume in the U.S. travels an average of 1,400 miles from farm to table. Shipping food great distances requires the use of valuable fossil fuel resources and makes our food supply vulnerable to destruction or contamination. Local food economies, in which small farmers, ranchers, and market gardeners grow food for local consumers benefit communities in many ways. They can provide a more secure food supply; offer fresher, healthier food to everyone; and create exciting opportunities for young people in agriculture. Young entrepreneurs are discovering career opportunities in small-scale agricultural production, marketing, distribution, and related fields. Inspired by school garden projects, farm internship opportunities, and small farm incentive programs, these young people are changing the face of agriculture by moving forward to the land in new ways and places.



Just the Facts

For lots of interesting (and surprising!) information about agriculture in the United States, check out the United States Department of Agriculture website at www.usda.gov.

Did you know...?

- In 1930, 2 out of 10 Americans made their living in agriculture; today fewer than 2 out of 100 people in the U.S. are employed as farmers or ranchers.
- Sixty percent of all farmers and ranchers are over the age of 55.
- Farming and ranching have become increasingly popular as part-time business ventures. Almost half of all farmers and ranchers in the West also earn income from other jobs.
- According to the USDA, commercial urban agriculture produces 40% of the total American farm product on just 10% of the country's agricultural land.
- Between 1994 and 1998 the number of farmers markets in the U.S. doubled. There are now more than 3,000 farmers markets nationwide.
- There are over 1,000 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs in the United States, most of which were founded in the last decade.
- Since 1990, the organic food industry has grown 20 percent or more *each year* and now constitutes an almost \$8 billion industry.



Questions for Discussion

Here are some questions for students to think about and discuss. Encourage students to generate their own discussion questions while viewing the film.

- ? What are some of the reasons consumers are buying local food products?

- ? What are some of the enjoyable aspects of farming and ranching?

- ? What advantages do small farmers have over large commercial/industrial farms?

- ? Why is the average age of farmers in the U.S. so high? What problems are associated with this fact?

- ? What new opportunities in agriculture are available to beginning farmers?

- ? What sort of education do you need to be a successful farmer or rancher? How might you pursue that education?

- ? How would you respond to this statement: The corporate food industry is dependent upon fossil fuel resources.

- ? What problems might be associated with depending on fossil fuels to feed people?

- ? Which person or persons in the film did you find most interesting? Why?

- ? Which kind of agricultural operation in the film did you find most interesting? Why?

- ? What kinds of careers are available in agriculture besides farming and ranching?

- ? How would you respond to this statement: You have to grow up on a farm or ranch to be a successful farmer or rancher.

Suggested Activities

Plan a moneymaking enterprise. You need \$500 for a trip that you and a friend are planning. You have saved \$100 and decide to use it as "seed money" for a summer agriculture project. Create a business plan to grow and market enough homegrown produce to earn money for your trip.

Interview someone interesting. You have an assignment to interview a local person who makes his or her living through agriculture. Who would you interview? Write down at least 3 questions you would ask this person.

Plan a school garden. Find an available garden plot on your school grounds. Decide what to grow (flowers, vegetables, salad greens) and why (to sell to raise money, to use in the school lunchroom, or for some other purpose). Research plans for designing a school garden. Contact local merchants and farmers to provide tools, seeds, and advice. Submit your plan to the school principal. What other steps and decisions are involved in planning your school garden?

Where is my foodshed? Go to your local grocery store. Pick 5 of your favorite fruits or vegetables from the produce section and find out where they were grown. Now read up on "foodsheds" (the area that encompasses where your food comes from—see Resources page 6). Draw a map of your current foodshed. How can you make your foodshed smaller? Can you find those same 5 fruits and veggies near where you live?

What's growing around here? What kinds of products do you think are grown or raised in your community? Research the agricultural scene. Who is producing what? Create a map of your area highlighting the farms, ranches, farmers markets, and gardens that surround you. Use symbols to indicate what crops are grown where.

How has U.S. agriculture changed? Choose a study question that interests you. Use the library, the internet, and other resources that will help you find the answer to your study question.

Sample study questions:

- What percentage of the U.S. population was employed in agriculture in 1900? 1950? 2000? Why has this number changed?
- What was the average size of a farm in the U.S. in 1900? 1950? 2000? Why has the average size of farms changed over time?
- How many farms were in the U.S. in 1900? 1950? 2000? Why has this change taken place?
- What is organic agriculture? What are the benefits of growing food organically? What are the limitations?
- What is Community Supported Agriculture? Where did it originate? How does it work?

Internship/Apprenticeship Opportunities

There are numerous farm internship and apprenticeship opportunities available to people in all regions and from all walks of life. You need not have on-farm experience to apply for an internship, but you should have a strong desire to work hard and learn by doing. The information below will guide you in your search for the program that best suits your educational needs.

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)

PO Box 3657 Fayetteville, AR 72702 Ph: (800) 346-9140

ATTRA publishes the most comprehensive resource list of learning opportunities in sustainable and organic agriculture available. <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/intern.html>

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC)

10301 Baltimore Ave., Rm 132 Beltsville, MD 20705-2351 Ph: (301) 504-6559

This is a listing of U.S. and international institutions and organizations with programs offering education, training information in organic, alternative, sustainable agriculture.

http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/edtr.htm

The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS)

1156 High St., Santa Cruz, CA 95064 Ph: (831) 459-3240

CASFS is a program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, dedicated to increasing ecological sustainability and social justice in the food and agriculture system. Their apprenticeship program provides training in the concepts and practices of organic gardening and small-scale farming. For more information visit: <http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/index.html>

California Farmlink

PO Box 2224, Sebastopol, CA 95473 Ph: (707) 829-1691

California Farmlink is one of many innovative programs in the U.S. linking aspiring and retiring farmers. They also maintain a page of apprenticeship opportunities and other interesting links:

<http://www.californiafarmlink.org>

Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA)

5245 College Avenue #508 Oakland, CA 94618 Ph: (510) 654-8858

MESA is a training program in sustainable agriculture for international farmers. In 2003 they initiated a reciprocal program for U.S. farmers in Thailand and Ecuador. See their website for updates:

<http://www.mesaprogram.org>

Organic-Research.com

This site maintains an updated listing of jobs, internships, and apprenticeships as well as a list of educational resources and courses offered in organic and sustainable agriculture.

<http://www.organic-research.com/index.asp>

Orion Grassroots Network (OGN)

The Orion Grassroots Network Internship & Career Service provides information about internship and employment opportunities with over 1,500 OGN affiliates nationwide. This resource is not specific to organic agriculture. <http://www.oriononline.org/pages/ogn/ics.cfm>

Other Resources

At the library:

Berry, Wendell 1977. *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. *An alternative view of the history of industrial agriculture and its effects on the environment and rural economies.*

Clancy, Kate 1997. "Reconnecting farmers and citizens in the food system." In *Visions of American Agriculture*, W. Lockeretz, ed. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press. *Describes non-farm components of a sustainable food system such as citizen education, food security, and institutional change.*

Freyfogle, Eric, ed. 2001. *The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life*. Washington, DC: Island Press. *A collection of essays celebrating a resurgence of agrarian values in America through urban agriculture, CSA, public schools education, etc.*

Kloppenburg, Jack, John Hendrickson, and George W. Stevenson. 1996. "Coming in to the foodshed." In *Rooted in the Land*, W. Vitek and W. Jackson, eds. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. *Proposes a "foodshed" (eating food produced in your area) model to get people thinking about the appropriate scale and framework for sustainable food systems.*

On the internet:

<http://www.attra.ncat.org> *The most comprehensive resource for sustainable agriculture information available on the web.*

<http://www.usda.gov> *Use the search engine to locate information on any aspect of agriculture in the U.S.*

http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_environment/sustainable_agriculture *The Union of Concerned Scientists maintains this list of Sustainable Agriculture Resources on the Web.*

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/training/manual> *A new training manual published by CASFS currently downloadable in pdf format (over 600 pages total)*

<http://www.localharvest.org> *Find farmers markets, CSA's and other sustainable agriculture initiatives in your area.*

<http://www.foodsecurity.org> *The Community Food Security Coalition website is a resource for information about food security, urban agriculture, and Farm to School programs*



By Kate Winslow

Excerpt reprinted with permission from Santa Fe Reporter, July 3, 2002. See link below for full article.

Nora Rodli stands on the edge of a bed planted with snow peas, the mid-afternoon sun casting short shadows on the furrowed earth. Nearby, her partner, Richard Bélanger, is irrigating a field of newly hilled potatoes. Leo, their yellow-haired mutt, throws himself into a stretch of knee-high oats and rolls around gleefully. The Chama River rushes just past the pumpkin patch, with the hills and mountains of Abiquiu rising directly from its banks.

Tomorrow, Rodli and Bélanger will rise early to pick those snow peas, as well as lettuce, green onions and whatever else is ready to be harvested. The couple will wash, spin, dry and bunch in preparation for Saturday's farmers' market in Santa Fe. They hope to do better than they did today at the Los Alamos farmers' market, from which Rodli returned with several bags of unsold produce and a bucket of wilting delphinium and yarrow bouquets.

Rodli and Bélanger are part of a growing group trying to wrest a living off the land. Although farmland in New Mexico has shrunk by half a million acres in the last decade, the number of small farms has actually risen—there are almost 2,000 more farmers now than 10 years ago.

Many of the new generation of twenty- and thirty-something farmers don't come from farming families. They pulled up roots from far-flung parts of the country and put them down in the difficult hills and valleys of northern New Mexico. By choosing this agrarian lifestyle, they have shunned the trappings of their peers' urban life: the daily vanilla latte, the Banana Republic wardrobe, the Palm Pilot, the home tricked out with the latest technology.

The benefits are obvious: clean air, fresh, healthy food and a lifestyle removed from some of the less savory aspects of urban culture. Perhaps less evident are the downsides: rocky finances, rough environmental conditions and the social isolation that comes from regularly putting in 18-hour days. Nonetheless, Rodli, 28, says, "I love growing food, and I love farming, but it's the rural lifestyle I fell in love with. I would go anywhere to find this lifestyle and this sort of self-employment."

As part of that lifestyle, today's young farmers also must grapple with the political and philosophical ramifications of choosing farming as a vocation in the 21st century.

Link to the full article: <http://www.sfreporter.com/archive/07-03-02.html>

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If you have questions about the resource guide or wish to order a copy of the Young Agrarians educational video, please contact: Johanna Divine, johanna.divine@nau.edu, 928.774.6116.