

Feeding the Village First

(A Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society position paper on the global economy)

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"But we have to feed the world . . ."
---A North Dakota farmer

"Why are American farmers investing so heavily in expanding ag export markets, when the richest, most valuable market in the history of mankind---and the market the rest of the world's farmers want access to through upcoming free trade talks--- is right here in the US? Can both strategies be right? Simultaneously?
--Alan Guebert



Summary

In this paper we provide an analysis of the role of agriculture in the global economy, using sustainability as the measure. We argue that as a first priority we should begin rethinking our food system in terms of local, self-reliant, value-added, value-retaining foodsheds, that supply a region's food needs, instead of relying totally on industrial production factories designed to supply raw materials to the global market, leaving local communities to import all of their food needs.

International trade would be based on surplus production, not vital production, making local communities self-reliant, and therefore truly "free" to trade. Finally, we offer a few strategies for beginning the journey toward this new food system.

I. The Global Economy: Myths and Realities

Herman Daly, the well known former World Bank economist, is fond of quoting John Maynard Keynes (one of the founders of the World Bank) with respect to world trade:

I sympathize therefore, with those who would minimize, rather than those who would maximize, economic entanglement between nations. Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel--- these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible, and, above all, let finance be primarily national. (Daly, 1996) (Emphasis ours)

These words have taken on a special significance in our time. In the current climate of economic deregulation (sometimes called neo-liberalism) the prevalent notion among economists is that the evolution of a global economy is inevitable, necessary and highly preferable. But it is important to remember that not all economists share this judgment and that that judgment is not based on scientific certainty. Indeed, critics like David Kortan argue that it is based on "ideological extremism". (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996)

Economic neo-liberalism, which has crafted the intellectual justification for a global economy, is based on a belief system. It is a "story" that describes one way of organizing our economic lives. It is not the only story available to us, however. And, of course, it is not the only economic future we can choose.

Economic liberalism's story is similar in many respects to the economic belief system of Karl Marx. Marx also believed that it was economics that determined history. He believed that the economic system inherent in capitalism would inevitably cause capitalism's demise. Most economists today contend that it was a flawed belief.

Economic neo-liberalism's belief is similarly flawed. The problem with theories of economic inevitability (like those of Marx and neo-liberalism) is that they are based on assumptions that are hardly self-evident. For example, neo-liberalism's assumption that individuals always act in their own rational financial self-interest cannot be substantiated from human experience. If that assumption were true, no one would affiliate with a religious organization that requires sacrifice. No one would have children. There would be few great works of art. And there would certainly be even fewer farmers.

The reason it is important to recognize these false assumptions is that it is only when we entertain the possibility that the current predominantly held views regarding the global economy are not inevitable, and that economics is not the only determining factor that shapes human society, that we can begin to think critically and creatively about the economic welfare of our communities and choose alternative futures.

It is also important to recognize that taking a stand against the development of a global economy does not necessarily mean that one is anti-trade or "protectionist", or that one has a callous disregard for the world's hungry and homeless.

International and inter-tribal trade is as old as human history. In the last half century archaeologists have found evidence of international trade among ancient societies that was much more extensive than historians had previously believed possible. For example, archaeologists in North Dakota recently discovered that a particular type of flint rock that lent itself especially well for making spear and arrow heads, can only be found in North Dakota. Yet spears and arrow heads made from this flint can be found all over North and South America. Indians living in what is now North Dakota traded them. They apparently also extensively traded food stuffs. But the interesting thing about the trade policies of these indigenous people is that they insisted on meeting the needs of the village first. Trade was based on surplus production.

We contend that these ancient trade policies were wise. Accordingly, while we support international trade, we question whether our local economies ought to be made dependent on, or victims of, a global economy which seeks to fit all cultures and communities into a one-size-fits-all economic system. We question the wisdom of forcing all cultures and countries, each of which have emerged out of different histories and different economic situations, into one economic straight jacket.

Could it be, for example, that Russia, now suffering from one of its most severe depressions, needs a Roosevelt-styled 'new deal' economy, instead of the Herbert Hoover-style free market economy that the G-7 nations are trying to impose on it? The global community needs a diversity of economic systems, not a single homogenized one.

In particular, we question the wisdom of a homogenized economic system where food and agriculture are concerned. We believe that in the case of food and agriculture it is particularly important (as it was among ancient societies that practiced international trade) to "feed the village first".

Feeding the village first is a concept which suggests that local community economies are healthiest when they are as self-reliant as possible, especially where food and agriculture are concerned. Self-reliant communities are healthiest because they are free to pursue their own course, shaped by cultural norms which evolved in those communities to maintain the local public good. For this reason it is also important to maintain a diversity of cultures, as these ancient societies did. Each local culture must be free to evolve so that it can protect the unique ecology and public good of each local community.

The global economy, by contrast, makes local communities vulnerable to the economic health and well-being of distant communities and of "owners" over which they have little influence.

Herman Daly has reminded us that trade is only free when we are free not to trade. (Daly, 1996) What Daly recognizes is that when the economy of a local community or region is dependent on distant communities to supply its needs and buy its raw materials, then its own economy becomes extremely vulnerable to economic forces over which it has no control. The effect of the collapse of the Asian and Russian economies on Northern Plains farmers in the United States in recent months has clearly demonstrated that phenomenon.

We can, for example, see this principle at work as we watch the agricultural economy of North Dakota collapse. The globalization and industrialization of agriculture has reduced farmers in North Dakota to raw materials suppliers of a few specialized commodities---primarily wheat and beef cattle. That means that almost no local resources are devoted to producing locally needed value added products for local consumption. That, in turn, means that we export all of our cheap raw materials and import all of our needed, expensive value-added products. This drains both, the wealth of the region's income, and the wealth potential of the region's raw materials out of our local communities. Such an economy is reminiscent of colonial economies.

Of course the proponents of economic neo-liberalism will argue that while all this may be true, it is still to the overall economic advantage of local communities to be part of a global economy so we can avail ourselves of the benefits of "comparative advantage".

The theory of comparative advantage was first espoused by David Ricardo, one of the great classical economists. To put it simply, the theory of comparative advantage suggests that each country (or region) should produce what it can produce most efficiently and import those things that others can produce more efficiently. And no trade barriers should be erected to "protect" the less efficient local production systems. This is the classical argument advocated by free trade proponents.

But as Daly points out, Ricardo's theory was based on a very specific set of assumptions, including the expectation that capital would remain "immobile between nations." Daly argues that since capital is now no longer rooted in local communities, Ricardo, were he alive today, "would not support a policy of free trade." Given the fact that capital today is controlled primarily by transnational corporations (TNC's) who are not held accountable to any local community, we no longer accrue the benefits of comparative advantage to the communities in which we live. Most of the benefits accrue to shareholders of TNC's who generally live in distant communities.

Consequently, Daly suggests that we need to ascertain whether or not trade is really mutually beneficial before we engage in it. We should determine whether or not "the gains from international trade and specialization are not canceled by the immediate disadvantages: higher transportation costs, increased dependence on distant supplies and markets, and a reduced range of choice of ways for citizens to make a living." We should also determine whether or not trade will cause a deterioration of natural ecosystems, destroy local natural resources or reduce quality of life before we trade.

But proponents of economic neo-liberalism will argue that even if these negative consequences occur, the globalization of agriculture is still necessary to feed an expanding human population. We have to feed the world!

That assumption is based on at least three flawed propositions. First is the assumption that people are hungry because we are short of food---that farmers are unable to produce enough. That assertion is totally false and repeatedly proven to be so. (Kirschenmann, 1997, Lappe` and Collins, 1986, Sen, 1981, 1987)

Second is the assumption that we can solve the population explosion problem simply by intensifying food production, especially the production of cereal grains. But ecologists have raised disturbing questions about that proposition. They argue that such intensification itself creates serious obstacles to meeting those goals. The obstacles include:

- the destruction of the very genetic resources needed to develop transgenic technologies;
- the degradation of the very ecosystem services needed to increase production;
- the environmental and human health consequences of intensive agricultural practices;

- the extreme climactic changes that accompany global warming which will likely jeopardize food production capacity. (Daily, et. al., 1998, Baskin, 1997)

Third, is the assumption that the only way to produce enough food for future human population growth is by intensifying our mass production of a few specialized commodities with new technologies. But we know from several thousand years of observation that small-scale, labor-intensive, local food production systems, wherein local people have access to production resources, are by far the most productive.

For example, under the ecological management of the Anasazi Indians, a small region near Dolores, Colorado in the desert Southwest, supported a population of over 100,000 citizens around 1,000 AD. That same region today supports less than 15,000. The Anasazi raised dryland corn that produced an average 40 bushels per acre. Today with all the modern technologies at our disposal, farmers can only obtain 14 bushels per acre average dryland corn production in that same region. (Anasazi Museum, Dolores, Co)

Once and for all we should acknowledge that hunger is caused by social inequity and the lack of access to food producing resources, not lack of production. As E.F Schumacher pointed out so eloquently 25 years ago, what we need to keep the world fed is not mass production, but production by the masses. (Schumacher, 1973) What Schumacher understood all too well, was the fact that when small, local farmers are pushed off the land (as Mexican farmers will be en masse in the next decade, due largely to free trade policies (Brandon and Franklin, 1998) the land gets concentrated in the hands of large land owners, and then the land gets used to mass produce commodities for export, rather than feeding local populations. And that usually creates surpluses of raw materials which end up putting farmers all over the world out of business. That exacerbates, rather than solves the problem of "feeding the world".

II. Industrial Agriculture and Unsustainable trends.

The global food system is fed by an increasingly industrialized agriculture which cannot be sustained. Industrial agriculture is based on three principles: specialization, standardization and centralization. These principles grew out of the factory model of industrialization. This factory model has proven very efficient in the production of many manufactured goods.

However, many business leaders are now questioning these principles because they largely fail to calculate the importance of the human factor in production. They also increasingly recognize that since these principles tend to externalize social and environmental costs, they put much of society, and sometimes even the industry at risk. When hamburger gets contaminated with E coli in a huge centralized beef packing plant, for example, the losses and liabilities connected with the recall of millions of pounds of hamburger, as well as the number of people at risk, is far greater than if a similar contamination were to occur in a locally owned, diversified butcher shop.

More important for agriculture, however, is our failure to recognize that farms are not factories and that the effort to impose these three principles on farms has created an agriculture that is headed for collapse. These principles create huge monocultures that have numerous adverse

effects. They make farmers vulnerable to the economic fortunes of a very narrow band of commodities. Farmers who have specialized in the production of hogs or wheat, for example, are currently being forced out of business due to the record low prices of those commodities. Farmers who have diversified farms, on the other hand, have also diversified their risks.

These industrial principles also impose a system of agronomic practices that dramatically increase costs and destroy the habitat of many species that are critical to efficient production. Our monocultures, for example have largely destroyed the habitat of indigenous pollinators, and have placed imported pollinators (like European honeybees) at great risk. The fact that one out of every three mouthfuls of food that we all eat is dependent on pollinators (Buchmann and Nabhan, 1996) requires us to ask what impact industrial farming practices actually have on our ability to keep the world fed.

The three principles of industrial agriculture are also largely responsible for farmers' increased production costs. A recent University of Minnesota Plant Diversity Task Force concluded that our vast monocrop systems in the Red River Valley have now revved up disease and pest cycles to such an extent that there is no way the research community can keep up with resistance technologies to stay ahead of the curve---no matter how much money we allocate for research.

Given the ever increasing need for inputs to support this system of agriculture, ND Extension Service calculated that it now costs North Dakota farmers \$117 an acre to produce wheat. Most county-wide average wheat yields in North Dakota run below 30 bushel an acre. That means farmers need to consistently get at least \$4 per bushel just to break even on their input costs. But given global-wide surplus production in 1998 prices hovered at \$2.50 per bushel. So farmers find it impossible to generate the cash to repay loans or purchase inputs for the next crop cycle.

Furthermore, standardization is based on the assumption that the environment is predictable and controllable. It assumes that one can take an isolated phenomenon (like corn borer pressure) and apply a standard therapy, like an insecticide or Bt seed corn. But every high school biology student knows that nature is complex and always evolving, and that therefore nature's response to applied technologies will vary from place to place and year to year. Accordingly, standardization is fundamentally contrary to nature's functioning.

But perhaps the greatest fallacy of industrial agriculture is the assumption that one can abstract a few agronomic principles and then develop standardized farming techniques to be applied universally. From experiments with hybrid seeds, for example, we concluded that hybrid seeds were superior in all places under all circumstances. In point of fact hybrid seeds are only superior when soil, climate and synthetic inputs are optimized. As one farmer put it---"you buy expensive seed and fertilizer and if you don't get rain, its like throwing money into the wind."

Since farming is an activity that takes place in living, local ecosystems, it simply makes more sense to craft farming systems that continually adapt to the local ecologies in which the farm is located. Ironically such adaptation suggests principles that are diametrically opposed to the three industrial principles. Ecological farming requires that we employ the principles of diversity, variability and integration, rather than the principles of specialization, standardization and centralization.

If we managed our farms by these ecological principles they would look very different from the industrial farms that now dominate the landscape. Instead of huge wheat farms and cattle ranches in North Dakota, for example, we would have more moderate-sized diversified farms which grow five or more crops and have two or more animal species. The crop and livestock systems would be fully integrated. The waste from the cropping systems would be fed to the livestock and the wastes from the livestock would be used to fertilize the crops. In some locations crops and livestock would both be rotated through the system. In other locations, due to the ecology of the land, livestock would be grazed on native prairie and crops would be grown in the "niches" of the prairie landscape. In all cases the diversity would keep diseases in check and provide for natural habitat that would harbor the species that help control insect pests.

The central operating principle of such a system would be "to manage nature so that she doesn't have to be managed." (Eisenberg, 1998) In other words a farm would be a production system in which nature's own ecosystem services would provide the majority of the fertility and pest and disease control that optimizes production.

A few USDA scientists are now actively promoting this kind of alternative agriculture. They argue that the "therapeutic" interventionist strategies of industrial agriculture, wherein the prevailing pest control strategy has been to kill pest organisms with toxic chemicals, has created a classic treadmill. The solution becomes the problem. That treadmill has actually increased crop losses due to pests. On a world basis crop losses due to insects, weeds and disease were 34.9% in 1965 and rose to 42.1% in 1988-1990.

These same USDA scientists argue that the more recent substitution of new classes of chemicals and the technologies of molecular biology has not changed the problem since these new technologies still conform to the same paradigm. (Lewis, et. al. 1997)

III. Strategies for Developing Sustainable Local Communities.

In his thoughtful book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Larry Rasmussen suggests that we should stop talking about sustainable development and start thinking about sustainable communities. The global economy will not help us here. Building sustainable communities, as Rasmussen argues, requires an ethic. (Rasmussen, 1996)

What kind of production ethic do we need to develop sustainable communities? Rasmussen points out that "the scientific discovery of the twentieth century" is the fact that the earth is a community. As Thomas Berry put it, the earth is a "community of subjects", not "a collection of objects". (Berry and Swimme, 1992) And the earth community is not a single, homogenized global ecosystem, but a complex array of many diverse, interconnected local ecosystems. (Eldridge, 1995)

This scientific discovery suggests that if we want to live on the earth in a sustainable way we have to begin to understand the "place" of the earth community in which we live, and learn how to interact with that place to preserve it as a healthy local community. And that place includes all the species with which we co-evolved. It follows that if we want food and farming systems that

sustain local communities we really do have to "consult the genius of the place" as Alexander Pope advised us some years ago.

Accordingly, local community life shaped by a culture that is rooted in the wisdom inherent in each local ecology, is the core requirement of sustainability. Living and farming in accordance with those principles must be the cornerstone of our new production ethic. Developing such an ecological consciousness as the proper context for farming, is the new challenge facing agriculture.

This new ecological consciousness is beginning to penetrate the fields of medicine, nutrition, forestry, and fishing, as people in all walks of life are recognizing that the human species is not insulated from the rest of earth community. It is that new consciousness that will shape the ecological farming revolution.

What are some of the strategies we need to implement to effect the transition from an industrial/global to an ecological/local food and farming system?

First, it means recognizing that changing from a global economy to sustainable communities, will require that we rethink the whole food and farming system. Simply getting farmers to rethink their farming systems, or to "go organic", won't work.

Today's farms are part and parcel of the global, industrialized economic system. The global market only demands a very narrow band of commodities. Just fifteen plant species are used to produce 90% of the calories consumed on this planet. (Soule, et.al., 1990) In the grain sector the market is largely limited to corn, wheat soybeans and rice. 80% of the 220 million acres planted to annual crops in the US are devoted to corn, soybeans and wheat.

Consequently there are no markets for the diversified crops that must be grown on ecologically managed farms. That, in turn, insures that without changing the entire food system the market will continue to force farmers into monoculture production, producing cheap raw materials for the global economy.

So we need alternative marketing systems as well as alternative farming systems. As a first priority we need to begin rethinking our food system in terms of local, self-sufficient, value-added and value-retained foodsheds that supply all of a region's food needs. Most food processing and packing operations must be locally owned, retaining the value that is added by such processing in local communities.

This would be a clear alternative to the industrial production factories designed to supply cheap raw materials to the global market, which forces producing communities to import all of their local food needs, and to export the value of their locally produced raw materials. International trade would be based on surplus production. In other words, it would be a marketing system that feeds the village first and truly makes local communities "free" to trade.

Admittedly, changing our whole food system will be a mammoth undertaking and we will not accomplish it in the next few months. But the new system is, in fact, already being developed so

we also don't have to start from scratch. Direct marketing schemes and locally owned value-added processing enterprises of various kinds are already in place and many of them are very successful. (Welsh, 1997)

But to expand these ventures, many of them small and largely isolated, into a comprehensive food system alternative, will require a systems dynamic approach that begins to systematize this sustainable alternative to the industrial food system. We will need to inaugurate new initiatives in education, public policy and market reform.

Following is a beginning list of things we can do:

Education

1. Initiate dialogs throughout farm communities that help farmers to understand that recurring farm crises are not due to low prices, unfair trade practices, timid export promotion, deficient safety nets, insufficient research or inadequate technologies. Economic farm crises are, in fact, inherent in the global economic system which operates on the principles of cheap labor, cheap raw materials, and externalized risk. So as long as farmers are suppliers of raw materials of a few specialized commodities, requiring intensive inputs that put farmers on treadmills, and force them to absorb most of the risk involved in producing those commodities, they will never be economically empowered. That is the first lesson every farmer has to learn.

2. Land Grant University systems need to begin helping farmers to understand the ecological neighborhoods in which they farm, and then provide assistance in developing natural systems farming technologies that mirror those ecologies. In the Northern Plains that means learning to understand the complexity of prairie ecologies, breeding seeds that produce food plants which thrive in such ecologies, and creating habitats that produce symbiotic relationships between native species and farming systems.

3. Develop media exposure that helps international communities to recognize that "feeding the world" is not a solution to the chronic problems of hunger and homelessness. We must create media scenarios that show practical alternatives to ADM's "supermarket to the world". Those scenarios would represent individuals and governments working together to eliminate hunger by promoting local cultural norms that bring human populations in line with other earth species in each ecological neighborhood. (Norberg-Hodge, 1991) Those efforts would include the education of women in every community. Those scenarios must include practical strategies for making adequate nutrients available to all people. Those strategies would include, but not be limited to,

- more efficient animal agriculture, cutting grain-based diets for ruminants at least in half, thereby making more nutrients available for humans;
- restoration and preservation of seafood ecologies. (While cereal production accounts for 50% of the energy intake of the world's poor, 60% of the world's population depends on seafood for 40% of its protein);
- international debt restructuring that would allow developing nations to use local production resources to feed local populations; and

- restoration of soil quality throughout the world to preserve and increase the yield potential of appropriate new technologies. It is now generally agreed that the reason crop yields have leveled off or declined despite new technologies is that declining soil quality prevents the yield potential of such technologies from being realized. (National Research Council, 1993)

4. Reconnect eaters with the ecological cycles of food production. No one should be considered properly educated without having first hand knowledge of where food comes from and how to produce and prepare it. Such knowledge should be considered as "basic" as reading, writing and math. Everyone should grow at least some of what they eat, regardless of where they live.

Public Policy

1. Gradually reduce the public subsidies that support industrial agriculture and shift part of those subsidies to programs that would help farmers transition to ecologically sound farming systems. In 1997 the Dutch Institute for Research on Public Expenditure prepared a report for the Rio+5 Forum which revealed that "subsidies from the public purse" in just four sectors (water, energy, road transportation and agriculture) amounted to \$700 billion annually, more than the entire international expenditure for arms. They noted, further, that of the \$335 billion in annual agricultural transfers, only 20% actually ended up as "additional farm income" (Renske van Staveren, INTERNET: rvanstaveren@iatp.org).

It is precisely the subsidies in these four areas that enable industrial agriculture to survive and largely contribute to the unlevel playing field on which local ecological farming systems must compete. If a small portion of these subsidies were redirected toward research to develop natural systems pest management, nutrient cycling systems, the reintegration of crop/livestock systems, and the development of locally-owned food processing enterprises and direct marketing, it could dramatically expand sound, locally based ecological farming systems that would benefit farmers, local communities and the environment.

2. Encourage state and local governments to establish tax policies which require that a percentage of local food needs purchased with public money be purchased from local farmers. If local governments required that 25% of the food purchased for prisons, state universities, county and state hospitals, and school lunch programs (all purchased with public funds) must be purchased from local farmers, it would create a substantial market for locally produced foods. Such local purchases would create an infrastructure for local production that the private sector could build on to create substantial markets for locally produced food.

3. International policies should be established through the United Nations that would focus on empowering the masses to produce their own food, rather than relying on transnational corporations to mass produce a few commodities to feed the world. The TNC strategy jeopardizes food security, pushes small, local farmers off the land, and appropriates food producing resources for profit- making, and for debt reduction in developing countries. As Martin Kimani, a leading agriculturist from Kenya puts it, it leads farmers to "producing food they didn't eat, and eating food they didn't produce." (INTERNET: avkrebs@earthlink.net)

Simultaneously it overproduces the few commodities for which there are markets, forcing independent farmers all over the world out of business. This process concentrates food production resources in the hands of a very few people, jeopardizing global food security.

4. Firmly enforce anti-trust laws and enact appropriate economic and social regulations (Castle, 1998) in the food and agriculture arena to insure free and open markets for farmers. The unprecedented mergers and buyouts in the food and agriculture industry are not designed to insure greater efficiency and lower costs for consumers. They are designed to concentrate economic power which will ultimately harm the interests of both producers and consumers, and surely will not feed the world.

5. Begin a comprehensive review of international energy policies and develop plans for an energy efficient food system in the post-petroleum era. Some oil industry analysts now predict that the world has about one decade of cheap oil left. (Campbell and Laherre`re, 1998) By the year 2010 we will begin to see oil prices rise dramatically. We need to establish policies now, that will prepare for that future to insure a continued supply of affordable food to all people on the planet. And that means food and farming systems that are much less petroleum dependent than the industrial farming systems of today.

Market Reforms

1. Encourage public/private partnerships to develop direct marketing systems, local entrepreneurship, and locally owned, value-added, value-retained food processing operations. North Dakota's public/private partnership arrangement, which has developed numerous locally owned value-added processing cooperatives and companies, could be expanded and used as a model for other regions. The North Dakota experience demonstrates that such partnerships don't necessarily require public subsidies since the increased tax revenues from such newly created locally owned enterprises often return the public's investment with interest.

2. Study the evolution of Farmers Markets, CSAs and other direct marketing institutions, and use them as models to explore additional direct marketing opportunities. There are numerous opportunities to develop direct marketing arrangements in various components of the farming sector. Mobile meat processing units, for example, could dramatically increase the direct sale of locally produced meat products.

3. Explore the possibility of establishing commodity "pools" (or other collective bargaining strategies) to give farmers additional bargaining power in negotiating fair prices of the raw materials they continue to produce. Such collective bargaining strategies would serve to help keep farmers on the farm while we transition to a local, community agriculture future.

4. Exploit the weaknesses of large firms as a means of insuring the sustainability of smaller, locally owned enterprises. Large industrialized operations do not possess the flexibility to adapt rapidly to changing market demands or the diversity to meet the quality requirements of market niches. Such weaknesses create market opportunities that smaller, innovative, local farmers and food processing enterprises can exploit. (Castle, 1998)

These strategies are not simply schemes to "save the family farm" or to "preserve our agrarian lifestyle" or to provide "safe, wholesome food" to well-to-do middle class Americans, important as those goals may be. The question which this transition from a global to a local food system seeks to address is one that was eloquently raised by Harold Breimyer and Wallace Barr. The question facing us all is. . . whether some version of a dispersed farm production and marketing organization is to prevail or whether the control of U.S [and world] farm production and marketing will be concentrated in a relatively small number of large firms. (Breimyer and Barr, 1972) The answer to that question has grave implications for every citizen of the planet.

Clearly the suggestions proposed in this position paper are a very meager beginning to getting us on the path to a transition from a global food system to one that feeds the village first. And it invites a dialog on these important issues among everyone invested in international food systems designed to keep the human species fed, while enhancing the ecological neighborhood that we share with the rest of earth's species.

As we engage in that process it might be well to be guided by some over-arching principles. We think that the late Stanley James Hallett, minister and renowned national community organizer gave us three principles that might serve us well on our journey. Hallett suggested that when it comes to human systems that are suppose to serve people

- small is better than big
- simple is better than complex
- and local is better than distant (McCarran, 1998)

The other bit of wisdom that we might put into our saddle bags as we go down this path of reorganizing our food system comes to us from Rick Welsh, policy analyst with the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture. We must understand, he writes, that the structure of agriculture in this or any other country is not an evolutionary or inevitable process, but a socially constructed arrangement of institutions, rules and relationships. The organization of agriculture today has resulted solely from decisions made by people, and can be altered and reorganized if enough people wish to alter or reorganize it. (Welsh, 1997)

We believe enough people do!

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Anazasi Museum, Dolores, Co. (See Agricultural display)

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