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# A Peaceable Acre of Plenty

*Home Farming After Sixty*

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# Preface: An Empty Lot

I was out standing in the rain this morning. I am blessed to have to go outside every day, several times a day. This was not why I became a farmer.

Most of what we call my working life I earned a living indoors at a desk, in an office, in a city, going from building to building in a vehicle. I'm now sure it is not always good to contain oneself. But I was so contained.

If I had my childhood wish, I would have been a farmer long ago. Few human endeavours, I know now, are closer to engaging the nature of regeneration and growth than farming. Alas, though my soul may have been in the soil, my head was lost to the heavens. In my case, my calling was a career in trying to bring heaven to earth (and earth to heaven), first by considering the priesthood, then as a psychologist. The human lot, for many, of hell on earth is the sufferings of mental illness and addictions, homelessness and poverty, prejudices and discrimination. I had to try to help.

Advisedly, there is more romance in farming than there is money; the money in farming is that put in by the farmer. The money made is in agribusiness. People spend a lot of money buying food from agribusinesses. We do a job on ourselves to keep the wolves from the door. Paying, all the while as well, for that door and all that's behind it. Paying wolves.

So, like others needing and wanting money, I worked long hours to have free time to go out, to get outside, to go away. I was tending to things inside thinking to manage things outside. The more time spent in a money economy, the harder it is to get out. I didn't necessarily wish to get out altogether. I did want to come out all

together with what I put in. Farming is intimately (and perhaps, uniquely) grounded in getting out what one puts in.

I chose a career of indoor employment because wages therein are ironically better than waging work out in the weather. Those wages I earned in order to go out, get outside, or go away. Mostly I went to places where I wanted to live when I retired. And it wasn't the city. Being close to 'services' ironically does a disservice to healthy living environments. Cities are not healthy environments. If retirement is the start of a life anew, mine would not be an urban renewal.

Retirement has been treated much like urban renewal. Certainly, if an edifice is still stable, it could be left standing, as is, with just enough maintenance to keep it livable and of use for the remainder of its years. If the governing body has the interest and wherewithal, it may renovate the property, give it new uses, or preserve it as history. The edifice might become neglected, as resources are few, or are used elsewhere. If the edifice cannot continue as it has, it either deteriorates until it is taken down, or is razed then and there, leaving an empty lot.

Have you ever seen an empty lot? If you have, you weren't looking closely enough. No plot of land is truly empty. An empty lot is a state of mind. Those who think otherwise are an empty lot.

I suspect that the notion of an empty lot is an urban myth. That is, in a nefarious twist of language and of minds, land where there is not yet a human edifice is somehow thought of as lacking. We also call such a plot a vacant lot. In this rendition, not only is the land thought lacking, the land is thought needing nothing but humans to fulfill it.

Certainly there are inspirational stories of how an in-town property becomes a park, or even a community garden. More often than not, a vacant urban lot is not zoned for such uses. It is regulated to remain 'empty' until a developer fills the lot with buildings for proscribed uses. In a city, the proscribed use may be a supermarket, but it is rarely a farm and seldom a garden.

The magazine, *Hobby Farms*, ran an article on urban farming laws that need to change. The particular cities are less relevant than the five laws. These were: urban edible gardens banned, composting forbidden, rainwater collection illegal, pro-

duce sales prohibited, and chickens forbidden. Laws are laws, it is said, because they are in the common interest. Debate should be short as to what the common interests might be regarding raising food. The underside of such urban laws is of little debate: you must buy all your food, you must make garbage, you must waste water, if you want to live here. You can fill your lot with consumer goods and consumer waste, but not with farming.

Other jurisdictions have become more enlightened. Yet, these places are still home to unenlightened inhabitants. Bylaws permitting food production protect those who choose to produce food on their residential lots. Other lots may have lawns or landscaping plants and, with some, house and multi-car garage taking up the property, the lot remains devoid of anything to eat. Might anyone who eats find sustenance in an empty lot? Might retirees find renewal in their growing sustenance?

Perhaps the needed urban renewal might be rural renewal, even in cities. Perhaps retirement is ready for rural renewal, wherever your lot may lay.

Over a six-month growing season, on as little a 10 foot x10 foot plot of empty lot, one person can grow enough produce to feed oneself fresh vegetables for part of a year. An empty lot of 400 square feet can provide not only fresh vegetables but fresh fruit, and there will be enough food produced to put some food by for winter. A half acre or less of empty lot can include a source of eggs and meat, even if the jurisdiction allows only four hens. Some city zoning might permit a dairy goat.

Many are reaching the logical conclusion of the so-called locavore movement - no food is as local as food we grow ourselves. While we see domestication in the human adaptation from hunter-gather to agriculture, agriculture as we now conceive it has devolved from the shared consciousness of a hunter/gatherer and a grower of food to unconscious consumerism. Much was lost when we stopped hunting, gathering, and growing.

Such an empty part of us can be reclaimed, even if late in life.

Now, unless your home has no 'empty' part, as in no yard, there is a good chance that you, individually or collectively, have 400 square feet outside to spare

for growing food, no? Inside? An irony might be that many homes, built with zero lot lines (house is built out to the property lines) may have a kitchen that is 400 square feet (or more). Such kitchens are made, it is said, for ‘entertaining’, though little of that entertaining apparently need involve preparing real food, though it may be where ‘meals’ are heated. Some home lots may seem too full for a vegetable garden, even if there might be space. Where would we put all the other things now in the yard? What would we do without a lawn? What would the neighbours think?

It appears, sadly, that growing one’s own food, if even considered, is too burdensome at best and an anachronism at worst. It is neither. This book is an homage to home farming and a testament to what one person with an empty lot can do toward feeding oneself, and toward feeding others.

This book is also an end-of-life story, of fulfilling and emptying my own life. Not all elderly can grow their own food. This book is a testament to that challenge, or a challenge to that testament.

Yes, growing one’s own food takes time. Some in retirement have more time in their remaining life than they know they could do with. For most retirees, careers were spent buying food. Why change now? Those not beaten to a complacent pulp by their careers have the option of enjoying a tasteful and nourishing life in home farming.

Modern life has taken that time it takes to grow food to instead earn money to buy food. Some time, and money, can be made available for growing food if you’d rather. I’ve regularly found time through the years to grow some food. Now in retirement, and having more time than money, I took to farming. As a retiree there is time. True, the absolute duration of time remaining to live is underscored by reaching retirement age. But, doesn’t it make sense that for one to end life well, one might live and eat well? Quality of life is the degree of sanity engendered through how one lives. There is no greater fullness in life than filling life with life. Growing food is a fullness life can achieve.

Or, one could remain one of many of an empty lot.

My lot in life was to eventually become a farmer. I had to retire to do so. Farming is no longer a career path that many follow. But it is a way to come home again. I wanted to follow those who have. From the time as a very young boy when I almost fell out of my bedroom window trying to get a better look at the vegetables in Mrs. Stevic's garden, and through buying this one-acre lot, I have wanted to be a farmer.

If you know anything about farming, you know that farmers are less and less appreciated in the food supply chain. If you don't think this is so, ask yourself where you buy your food. I suspect it is rarely, and minimally, directly from a farmer. Our food supply chain is so long, we forget it is a chain, as long as there is a supermarket chain nearby. This dependency is apparently a chain most blithely choose to wear.

After retirement, in my mid-sixties, I turned our one-acre lot into a farm. Now in my seventieth year our home is a farm where, with regular but simple maintenance, much of everything we eat is grown within short walking distance of our back door. We are not self-sufficient. That is neither our goal nor an end ever achievable, nor frankly desirable for social beings. We can become *self-efficient*. I believe anyone can, potentially, grow all of one's own food, with support. A retiree has supported oneself and probably a family for many years. My wife's and my goal, in terms of what we eat, was to become as self-supporting as we might, for as long as we might.

Self-support through home farming is not an empty promise, as long as one doesn't see one's lot as empty.



# Before Buying The Farm

An old farmer is walking down by the pond when a frog jumps up on his shoulder. “Kiss me,” the frog entrances, “And I will be your beautiful young wife.”

Quickly the old farmer replies, “Having already a beautiful old wife, I’d rather have a talking frog.”

And just as quickly, the old farmer snatches the frog and puts it in his pocket.

I’ve carried such a frog in my pocket since I was a boy. In urban slang, ‘a frog in one’s pocket’ is akin to having a stick up one’s bum. Irritable to irascible, touchy to tetchy, spoilsport, curmudgeon, buzz-killer, naysayer, fuddy-duddy, and grand pooh-pooh...I have been called all of these. Somehow remaining even-tempered, I have stayed angry about the world I was born into much of my life. Such anger has been honed to a virtue.

I’ve heard it said that if you’re not angry, you’re not paying attention. I believe that. Even in how we talk of giving one’s attention as paying, a monetary transaction, we have a relationship with a world of temptations of what’s new(s) and to be bought. Perhaps as I’ve gotten older I’ve come to resent the implication that what is old is not good. I’m no longer buying that new is always better.

When I was a boy, a frog in a pocket was an image of a childhood spent exploring the backwoods and backwaters still remaining outside of civilization. I put as much of this world into my pockets as I might. When school and work would give me breaks, I broke away to places where time had slowed and seemingly paused. The old ways were always new to me. And so it is in the September of my life, re-

calling an older world where I am less angry, my beautiful old wife and I have begun to grow as much of our own food as we might.

Growing one's own food is not a new idea; it's in our nature. Living in a world where food is thought of as a convenient supermarket, my wife, Leslie Anne, and I are deciding in favour of an old way to get new food. Like the promise of a beautiful young wife, we take the frog in hand and use that frogness to work the miracles we have available. The frog's temptation is all about replacing what one has with what is new. It is more challenging to make the old desirable. Take note that the talking frog is seeking to escape her own condition. I'm finding a life more basic when I talk with the frog about the condition we have in common. Farming is a pocket to put my frog in.

This story may be about pockets. It isn't about deep pockets. It cannot be about empty pockets. It can be about pockets with holes in them, if we learn how to sew. Yet, no, it is not about deep pockets. It is about taking what is in our pockets from earning a living and using it to make a living. The return of a farm home may bring back the way we make our living.

Let the frog be our guide. A frog begins as a film on a pond, swims its way to land, keeps close to the ground, daily consumes its own weight and more in pests, and is unfairly blamed for warts. Living on land and needing water. A frog is an archetype of basics, for good or ill, as much as a symbol of transition and transformation. It is a creature of place, a place that must at once of needs be one of safety and shelter and food. And a frog knows how and when to croak.

So, I knew that before I croaked I wanted to buy the farm.

Something is always dying. Even jokes. You probably know "buying the farm" as a euphemism for death. It was used first to speak of soldiers who die in battle. The 'farm' purchased was thought to be heavenly firmament, rather than the terra firma the soldier had hoped to buy, and settle down on, after war.

I'm not dead yet. But who wants to become a farmer in their seventh decade? Who wants to do any work in their seventh decade? There is much to ask about aging and farmers. If you rely on any recent census, the mean age of farmers has increased: more older farmers than younger farmers. When correlated with a reduc-

tion in farmland, it is feared there will be fewer farmers to grow our food. This ‘farm crisis’ thinking is for people who still think of census farmers and commercial farms as the only possible source of our food. If we follow this line of thought, there are fewer farmers, older farmers, less farmland, and less affordable land, at that, to attract new farmers. How one will ever have enough food to feed oneself is the real fear.

Looking more closely, the aging of farmers is commensurate with the aging of the general workforce. And, as farming entails an assumed lifestyle, it is not surprising that the lifestyle entails working to an older age, especially on a home farm. Farmers have been older than the general workforce for years.

The false assumptions garnered from census data are (1) that all of the farmers counted are producing food for people, (2) that fewer farmers means less food, and (3) that new farmers are young farmers. I’d like to focus on the last assumption to give focus to the first two: some of us enter farming later in life. Older farmers may have been counted in an earlier census and not be farming in the next census...or vice versa. Let us only surmise, in the modern economic paradigm, that more old people are able to start farming than are young people. This is in no way to take away the lifetime farmers, those who grew up with their farms, grew with their farms, and grew old. I talk of people like me who became farmers, sometimes with a commercial aim, but more often than not to grow our own food. And, lest we overlook, many people, old and young, who will never be farmers, or considered farmers, grow at least some of our own food. Yes, some of us, despite the welcoming shelter of supermarkets, are just old-fashioned that way.

Let me, as an old farmer, now give that focus to the assumptions that census farmers are all producing food and that less of these will mean less food. The real farm crisis is a food crisis. More of what we are told is ‘food’ is grown in corporate boardrooms and biotechnology laboratories, not ‘fresh from the farm’. We eat many more food *products* than basic foods. What crops are grown on farms are less and less as human edibles, and more and more rudiments for processed substitutes for food, as feed for meat and dairy animals, to make pet food, and for biofuel consumption. This is the farm food crisis and the main gripe of the frog in my pocket.

This story is for those of us who wonder what would be if we grew our own food, and particularly as we grow old. And we wonder what is possible if someone wants to grow some or most of her or his own food? One thing that is probable is that you will not be counted as a farmer in any census. What is possible was the wish I talked over with my wife, and my frog, when I was approaching retirement.

If one looks, most any home could be a farm. That is, some food can be grown almost anywhere. Once, while living in a multi-storey apartment building, some cherry tomatoes had dropped (been tossed?) from the neighbour's window above into our window box. The seeds sprouted the next spring. We had the most luscious cherry tomatoes that summer...and a vine that shaded the entire window!

Still, if one is more intent on raising a variety of foods, in any volume, having a plot of land is advised. How much land makes a farm? You will find that the definition of a farm does not specifically mention land in any amount. You may be surprised to learn that there is no quantitative definition of a farm whatsoever. There are however quantitative definitions used by governments: since 1974 the U.S. census definition has been “any place from which \$1000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the reference year”. My farm, though in Canada, meets this definition. In Canadian census terms, a farm is only a farm if what it grows or raises is intended for sale. Also, in my local jurisdiction, with a one-acre farm, I would need to sell \$10,000 in farm goods to be considered a farm for tax purposes. In some parts of North America, farms of sizable acreages, which have been continuously farmed for over a century, are now being rezoned as ‘residential’, simply because the farm family resides there, even though the farm receives no water, sewage, or other services as similarly zoned, residential lots do. The residential lot owner pays property taxes to receive water, sewer, and other ‘public’ services. What does a farmer pay for? Farming is only a tax shelter when your shelter is not taxed as ‘residential’.

The dictionary definition of a farm is merely qualitative: “farm: place producing particular animals and crops; place used for agricultural purposes” (one potentially dystopian definition of a farm is ‘a place used by industry’).

Giving a still more qualitative sense of a farm, I will add that the particular animals and crops would be intended to yield food, the quintessential agricultural purpose. Strangely, perhaps, the early meaning of agriculture was of people cultivating fields for food, not about a field called agriculture that determined what we eat as a culture. The acre in *agriculture*, now a quantified area of land, was first a name for a field of random size and later, when a quantification, a measure of human capacity with respect to such a field: the area a person with a yoke of oxen could plow in a day.

*Culture* was first the tilling of the land, the cultivation of food.

For our purposes, we will invoke the qualitative definition of a farm. Let us keep in mind that, if it is agriculture you wish to do, not all land otherwise suitable for growing food is permitted for such, even if the food is for your own consumption. Many homes, like our former apartment, might have a window box, or even a corner where one could grow a vegetable patch, a few berries, or such. But don't dare to farm. The zoning where we farm requires that the property be at least one acre in size in order to be used for agricultural purposes. Our property is 1.05 acres; my neighbour's property is .97 acres: we are permitted to farm; he is not.

Even with the return of backyard vegetable gardens (front yard vegetables forbidden), of chickens in some municipal areas, and in some locales, a family goat, farming is prohibited in most places where people live. In short, whereas the norm a few generations ago might have been people growing their own food at home, in most places it is generally now illegal to grow your own food.

My story, then, is about how I became a legal farmer who is not considered a farmer and how my farm that is not a farm is a farm. And it is about how I do this in retirement. This is not about hobby farming, urban or suburban farming, mini or micro farming, backyard farming, or any other nuanced substitute term for home farming. Home can be, some might say should be, as for a frog, a place where safety, shelter, *and* food are all cultivated and assured.

Whereas, many (most?) of our forebears grew up growing food, most of us did not. In fact, our progress has been, if you will, from the sedentary to the sedentary – we have taken ourselves away from real dirt and real work. Even with our

gym workouts, jogging, yoga and Pilates classes weekly, many are unable to meet the daily rigors of home farming, even long before retirement. Much of my own career, without ever much in the way of an ‘exercise program’, was spent sitting at a desk or in commuter traffic. So wouldn’t some conditioning program have prepared me for farming? Well, yes and no.

The key, for me, was to have been physically active in natural environments. While I never was or will ever be an athlete, I will stipulate that athletics itself is not a natural environment, even if it sometimes occurs out of doors. Physical activity in natural environments includes such activities as walking where there are no sidewalks, climbing where there are no stairs, and in moving natural objects like rocks and logs and dirt around. I did these all regularly, when I wasn’t burdened with commuting, desk work, and exercise programs. And, because I had a frog in my pocket.

I have been blessed, too, with good health. While I endure body aches from injury and exertion, and general age, I have not broken anything larger than my nose and a couple fingers. My diet has never concerned me, per se, though I have at times experimented with vegetarian and vegan diets, macrobiotics, and junk food. My mother taught me how to cook, so I’ve developed a good habit of simple and raw whole ingredients. I am a moderate user of mind-altering substances, including coffee and television. And, as an educated psychologist, I can assure you that I certainly have mental health issues, but these are with the profession.

The mind of a farmer is a terrible thing for waste. I was blessed, too, being born into a poor family. Most everything we had was reduced, reused, and recycled long before this was ‘green’. Farming, by nature, is about minimum input and maximum output, with little to no waste. A farmer’s epiphany is that moment of an enlightened consumer mentality; it is learning to reduce, reuse, and recycle what we consume, buying less and less of things, including the need to consume. The consumer focus of a home farmer is that of feeding and eating.

While remaining a sound mind in a sound body is especially conducive to growing food while growing old, growing food while growing old (which even young people are doing) can help assure that sound body and sound mind. The debilitat-

ing back problems I suffered while commuting and working at a desk are gone. After years of elevators, escalators, and other vehicles moving me around I can still walk, bend, and climb stairs and ladders. I haven't had a cold or the flu since I started farming. And, I no longer have the urge or time, or need, to worry about my mental health.

Now that you know that I am not talking about going into the agribusiness of farming, what are the limits on how much of one's own food old people with a small lot can grow? That discussion is greatly what this book is all about. Some of the answers will be revealed; others revealed after the book is done. I never expected that our one-acre farm would produce enough food to sell, just enough to eat. But we do sell some, just not enough now or ever to officially be a farm. You will quickly see, though, that what we are doing is farming, not gardening nor hobbying, but farming.

I haven't yet found a reason why we can't live well within the limits of growing our own food. There are, though, I've discovered, hundreds of limits to doing well in home farming and within the capacity of a home farmer:

- 100 day growing season; or better;
- 100s of hours of reading and research;
- 100 hours per month average in farm development and maintenance;
- 100 paces from one part of the farm to another, or 50 paces carrying 50 pounds;
- 100 pounds lifted and held for 100 seconds;
- 100 inches as the ultimate height of farming;
- 100 pounds yield from each of 10 classes of vegetables and fruit;
- 100 farm creatures, very few numbers of those weighing more than 100 pounds;
- Able to construct buildings under 100 square feet;

- Up to \$100 per week to spend on animal feed (sell just enough surplus eggs, etc. to 're-coop' the cost);
- 100 minutes a day to care for the animals;
- 100 foot garden hose;
- 100 foot electrical cord;
- Not having hundreds of other things to do;
- Not having 100s of thousands of dollars;
- Not being 100 years old, yet.



# Enclosure and Openings

If we look out our windows or go out of doors, many of us see a lot of other windows and doors. We are tempted to see the earth in terms of our world. We see windows of opportunity and doors to enlightenment, we say. In nature there are neither doors nor windows; there are only enclosures and openings. Humans do not always see these.

While a plot of open land is needed for farming, it is the farmer who must use enclosures and openings to define the farm. It is the forming of the environment in accord with what the environment favours. Having a plot of land where food has naturalised is a favourable environment: the seed grasses we saw when we first walked our land, the wild strawberries and wild cherries, the blackberry brambles, and acorns. No, it was not our intention to forage for wild foods. These plants merely reveal a place where nature grants favours. Manmade openings and enclosures are arranged to gain nature's fullness of favour.

With limits and limitations in mind, farming attends to boundaries. Unlike other animals, we mark our properties with legal deeds and litigation and as lines made physical. In any case, the property you farm will have a defined perimeter. The zoning regulation I'd mentioned earlier is a type of boundary. It specifies what you can and cannot do within the physical perimeter of your land. It is the physical specifications of nature and of the ecosystem that determine what is done where on a farm. As good houses are built advantageously facing optimum sunlight, where the house is located on your property probably determines what other farming will not be done there. The remainder of the property, dry or wet, loamy or stony, high or low, in sun or in shade, determines what part of farming is done

where. Remember, in home farming the entire home is a farm, the entire farm a home.

Where we live, the dominant feature of the landscape, other than the sea and mountains, is tall trees. Conifers grow generally about one foot taller per year, to full statures of more than 100 feet. Douglas fir, in particular, and most plentiful in this place, grows to 200 feet. As I am less than six feet tall, and spend most of my days close to the ground, I live in the shadow of tall trees. In this environment, though a quite temperate climate, there are challenges to growing vegetables and fruit. Challenges, however, are not boundaries, only limitations, though not necessary limits, even then.

In the history of the this part of Vancouver Island I learned that our farm was a parcel of a larger seaside farm, a dairy farm. A portion of the bay had been diked to expand grazing ground. This is hard to imagine when you see the prevailing tall trees now from the mountains down to the sea. Our property is but a clearing in the forest.

To welcome a little more sunshine, we had the forest thinned to the north, or back, of the property. This is the sheep paddock. There is evidence now, that someday, with the help of the sheep, grass will cover the paddock. At the south, front, edge of the property, along the road, there is a stand of the tallest Douglas firs. Their tops tend to cancel sunlight on the gardens for the months of April and September. We had thought of having these taken out (yes, I know that sounds like a gangland hit...drastic measures were contemplated). Fortunately, perhaps, the closeness to the road and to power lines made any logging operation prohibitive. Since we couldn't take the trees down, we had them spiral-pruned upward. We still don't have much sun in April or September, but we do now have sun between October and March allowing longer vegetable production. You may be surprised by a fall into winter growing season. We were. Even indirect sunlight is sunlight.

If I ask you to picture a farm, I suspect you not only see field crops, farm buildings, and fences, but also livestock. I've read that even vegetarian and vegan farmers have found the merits of keeping manure animals. Whatever diet one follows, religiously or not, the farm itself is an omnivore. For a farm to feed us, it must be

conceived, as much as possible, to feed itself. Vegetable compost is useful but can never be as plentiful, complete, and desirable as animal manure and animal compost.

Of course, even vegetarians have to figure out what to do with farm animals other than take their shit. For the small home farmer, the most concentrated form of food, dare I say, is meat. Much of what we feed meat animals is indigestible by us (e.g., hay). Animals convert the inedible into tasty eggs, dairy, and meat. Animal flesh and organs yield an array of nutrients, some not present in a plant-only diet, and do so as a much more nutrient-rich food.

Still, the idea of a farm, and I would hope of any diet, would be to cultivate a varied selection of as much food as might be produced by the farm. And to not need a diet of too much of anything. We wanted an acre of holistic diet, including eggs, meat, and dairy. A single acre can grow a lot more animal-based food than it can enough beans and grains, especially in a forest.

While some home farmers may be able to devote acres and acres to each or either plants or animals, our one-acre farm needed to be apportioned to grow an array and amount of food to serve a substantial portion of our diet. This apportioning is first in the constructed enclosures and openings that make a farm a farm. This is where learning how to construct fences and buildings is much cheaper than earning a lot more money to have someone else build your farm. Nonetheless, even a frugal, talented farmer will need help and money to develop land into a home farm.

Fences are made to keep things out and to keep things in. For the home farmer, it is wise to consider how we do both. Fences, as in offense and defense, may be offensive and not actually defend the farm from harm. Our perimeter fence is six feet tall with barbed wire running at its top and bottom. Our fence may, at first, sound offensive, but I assure that, seeing it, this is not so. In the limits of home farming, the area to be fenced need be one that an older home farmers could afford, build, repair if needed, hopefully never have to replace, and like looking at.

Our farm is totally enclosed, excepting the immediate area in front of the house and the front yard. The north and east side of the acre, where we have resi-

dential neighbours, are solid, wooden privacy fences. The other two sides are of eight open horizontal wood rails, with the lower four rails spaced closer together to prevent lambs and goat kids from squirming out and predators from creeping in. Around the bottom of the part of the perimeter fence enclosing the sheep, for added assurance, I have also run a strand of barbed wire.

These fences, albeit sturdy and tight, will not absolutely keep predators out. They have, so far, kept our livestock in. Oh, there is the one time that Gypsy, the goat, was found in the sheep paddock. Fences are primarily to show boundaries, which to animals are obstacles they try to avoid. Like we like to avoid obstacles

As the greatest predator threat to sheep and goats is domestic dogs, such a fence works well. Cougar and bear and deer used to pass through our property, until we built the fence. Now they go around. The fence must help. Lighting the property and keeping our own dogs also helps.

In the interest of honesty and age, I did not build the perimeter fence myself. I enlisted the efforts of two men half my age who could work twice as fast. All of the cross-fencing I did do myself, though using my head for other than balancing rails would have suggested a need for help. Safety aside for the moment, one old person can build quite suitable, and attractive, fences.

Cross fencing was built to provide the sheep a paddock, to give the goats a yard, and to afford individual runs for the poultry. Some home farmers like the sight of fowl roaming free. So do my dogs. To remove temptation for the dogs and prevent consternation from neighbours finding flighty birds, or grazers and browsers, in their yards, all of our farm animals are fenced in. And all animals, except the small or the airborne wild, are fenced out of the vegetable, fruit, and flower gardens.

The foregoing discussion of home farm fencing attends primarily to its functional intent and use: keeping harm away, in the whole. Fences enclose while providing openings. The Tao Te Ching tells us:

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;  
It is the center hole that makes it useful.

Shape clay into a vessel;  
It is the space within that makes it useful.  
Cut doors and windows for a room;  
It is the holes which make it useful.  
Therefore profit comes from what is there;  
Usefulness from what is not there.

We can see fences as wheels, as vessels, and as doors and windows. Each life raised within fences revolves around the space created: for vegetables, for sheep, for goats, for poultry. Containment is in the interests of all life in the constructed environment of a farm. Fences, with gates, of course, are the windows and doors through which we see life going on and which allow it to go on.

I built our fences of wood. In addition to being a material plentiful in our neck of the woods, it says something of where my head is. As an artificial, constructed environment, a farm that is built in the woods seems more neighbourly if built *of* wood. Wooden fences can honour trees. Aesthetically, too, the look and lines of wooden fences have always given frame and feature to the spaces they accent. Remember, on a small home farm you want, too, the sight of your gardens and animals to be pleasantly enhanced.

And, with a couple power saws, a simple wooden fence can take on the whimsical joy possible in being a farm home. Here are a couple of tricks:

- After you have attached vertical pickets to fence rail sections, cut an arc through the tops of the picket panel. For six foot pickets, use a spare picket to make a compass board. That, simply put, means drilling a pencil-sized hole near the top of the board, in the centre, so that it can be a compass. To use as a compass board, set the end of the board opposite where you've drilled the pencil hole to align with the bottom of the centre picket in the fence panel. With a pencil point inserted through the hole you've drilled to just touch the centre picket, pivot the bottom end of the compass board so as to draw a penciled arc on the pickets to either side in the panel all the way to its end posts. If the panel is approximately

8 feet wide, the arc will be close to six feet in the centre and no less than four feet at each end. Use a scroll saw to cut along the pencil line.

- For added panache, you can dress the fence tops in what my wife, Leslie Anne, calls Battenberg lace. Using different hole saws on a power drill, cut arranged holes along the top of the now arched pickets. Diamonds can be also cut where two pickets meet. Or hearts, or? A fence like this, I caution, might hum in the wind.

When we purchased the property that was to be Croft Farm, in addition to the Cape Cod house, there was a woodshed and a very small barn. The tiny barn, while quaint, could well have been built from a kit. The 8X12 structure, complete with gambrel roof, had evidence – a small low door - that chickens had resided there previously. What was left of what might have been a chicken yard outside that little door was littered with glass, wire, and brickbat. A lean-to shed had been built on the backside of the small barn. It was occupied by common rural trash, car parts and spent appliances. This was to be the start of the sheep shed.

While I've seen many an old property razed to make way for the new tenants' vision of a home, the old buildings, if usable, are probably best usable where they are.

The home farmer does not need to be a genius to get to know the *genius loci*, or 'genius of the place'. In Roman mythology, the *genius loci* was thought an actual spirit entity. This spirit was thought to protect the space. Present day notions of such spirits tend to refer to the natural qualities of the place rather than to an entity that might live there. In the likelihood that some entity – animal or vegetal or etherial– is already living in most places on your farm-to-be, it is wise to consult these. No, no system of divination is needed. Before you cross your property, just stop, look, and listen.

The poet, Alexander Pope, is said a key propagator of the notion of the spirit of the place with respect to architecture in the landscape. As the farm is a built environment, Pope's words are aid to the home farmer:

Consult the genius of the place in all;  
That tells the waters to rise, or fall;

Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,  
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;  
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,  
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,  
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;  
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.

In essence, the genius of a place tells where to put, and not to put, things. I will use the lean-to that was to become our sheep shed as an example. While the small barn was built on a poured concrete slab, the lean-to is merely a roofed over dirt floor. While large enough to shelter the few sheep we planned to keep, it is not a large enough area in which also to feed them. In our rainy winter climate, a gracious shepherd will also provide cover over that area. Now, while the small barn and lean-to are centrally located on the farm, so is the lowest lying area. This is not a problem for the barn, nor particularly for the chicken yard on its upland side. Had I stopped, looked, and listened during one of the common winter down-pours, I would have seen the puddling on the backside of the lean-to. So, what happens in such a place when you roof over even more of that area? And, moreover, what does it mean if you also place the sheep's entry into the expanded shed along this perpetual drip-line? A ditch (swale) was dug to divert this water onto the pasture-to-be.

Another example of not first paying attention to *genius loci*: while blueberry is an acid-loving plant and a forest shrub in its wild origin, planting ours behind the sentinel row of Douglas fir along the front of the farm greatly slowed the growth of the blueberries and therefore the fruiting. The spiral trimming of the lower branches of the tall trees has helped. I was so attentive to mapping our one acre that, though everything fit on paper, not everything was fitting where I put it.

It should not take a genius to discover that living in a place changes the place. Raising livestock changes the place. For one thing, it attracts other creatures, such as vermin. I learned that another challenge my blueberry bushes were having was the gnawing of rats. Exterminating rats may mean we have a crop of blueberries. What would exterminating rats change? All for the good?

If the would-be farmer has chosen a place in which the general environment and ecology are conducive to farming, or can be made so, nature can be very accommodating. There is, for a positive example, only one area of our farm where we could possibly plant a vegetable garden. Though I watched closely the transit of the sun for the year prior to moving to the farm, an attentive walk around the property revealed the buried flagstone paths that had framed former vegetable beds. The former beds were neither of the size nor number for our needs. I had already planned to construct raised beds, so the existing stone paths would have to be unearthed. I would have liked to keep them as the walkways between the raised beds. As I dug out the flagstones, slowly, I found the paths were not where they needed to be to accommodate the number of beds the sun-blessed area could accommodate. And, there were already too many stones that would be under the raised beds. You will also recall, I had indicated that the paths had been buried. Each flagstone bore on its back many seasons of the arising and demising of organic matter. The harvested and cleaned flagstone did serve elsewhere: as doorsteps for outbuildings and as an attractive heat sink under the grape arbour.

In addition to the expansion of the sheep shed, which was expanded a second time when our flock tripled at lambing time, we have added two chicken coops, a turkey coop, and a duck house. While I will talk more of livestock as the story continues, it is important in discussing enclosures and openings to consider space needs, especially the nature of the space, in every sense.

Chickens require very little space as long as the space is enclosed and open. This rules out both battery cages and free-roaming fowl. Chickens descended from jungle birds, so they never had to fly far. Food, shelter, and safety under the trees was as chicken-friendly as an environment gets. Even the heavier breeds of chickens do well only needing about four square feet of space! That's a two-foot square. What such a quantitative approach does not tell us is that it best not be the *same* two foot square for that bird's lifetime. Better is, in planning for a flock of chickens on a home farm, to use this factor to determine the *minimum* room needed by the flock. I use the four square feet per chicken measure to assure both the minimum size of the coop building *and* the minimum size of the outdoor chicken yard, or at least twice the space.

As you'll recall, the little barn had been a chicken coop. I partitioned the interior to allow a storage space as well as the coop. The coop space allotted was then 8x8 feet, or 64 square feet. Basic space needs indicated that this could house up to 16 chickens. That's the measure I use to house no more than a dozen chickens. Remember, too, that an additional outside yard on our farm is as large, or larger, than the interior of any coop.

A dozen hens, on average, when laying regularly, each produce two eggs every three days; say, four per week. Quick arithmetic tells us a dozen hens will provide four dozen eggs in that week. We generally have about forty-five, or more hens laying. They provide ten to twelve dozen eggs, or more, weekly. But, we do not, in both the chickens' and our interest, want to house forty-five or more chickens together. So, I have built multiple chicken coops. And, as it takes about five months for young chickens to mature, keeping replacement stock can mean housing up to twice as many chickens at a time. In short, if you only want enough chickens to provide eggs for a couple or small family, the single small coop will serve well. We want our chickens to have eggs to sell to pay their room-and-board. Think of this as re-cooping the costs.

It is possible that, like us, you may not want your animal protein only from chickens and chicken eggs. There are other domestic fowl that also have limited space requirements. Once, when my wife and I went to pick up some replacement chickens for the first flock that had been mercilessly slaughtered by a mink, my wife surprised me by suggesting we take some of the turkeys also then available at the neighboring farm. We'll talk more of adding poultry in Chapter 5.

Oh, yes, the mink.

In discussing enclosures, and as I indicated in talking about fences, there seems no foolproof way to prevent predator intrusion to enclosures, including buildings. Where there's an enclosure, they find an opening. That is not to say there is much room to be a fool in farming. The mink, as you know, is a long, skinny rodent. From that you might easily deduce that such a varmint could easily weasel its way in through the smallest of openings (a one inch opening is sufficient).

One early Sunday morning this happened for the first time at Croft Farm. What you may not know about mink is that they are not particularly meat-eaters; they are vampires. And, they take trophies. The mink kill in a chicken house is typically a sight of every chicken dead and drained, but whole, except for one chicken with a missing head.

If you are not familiar with hardware cloth, become so in farming. This narrow mesh galvanised metal mesh can close up the easily accessible entrances for rodents. Do keep in mind, though, that rodents chew through obstructions to make their own entrances. Or, just to chew. They chew through wood and plastic. They chew through metal, too.

I've learned to use wire mesh and stones to fortify the ground perimeter of poultry areas, but smaller rodents, like rats, come and go easily. Actually, once resident, rats don't really go that easily. Rats and farming seem a symbiotic relationship.

Knowing that vermin are part of the ecology just means that you learn to discourage, dissuade, deter, and, as needed, destroy vermin, before they begin to outnumber the other living things on the farm, and to destroy the ecology. An ecological word of caution: the use of first generation anticoagulants, e.g., warfarin, are effective and should pose no threat of secondary kill, i.e., creatures eating poisoned vermin are not poisoned, as the rats eliminate the poison. Second generation anticoagulants, e.g., brodifacoum, are cumulative in the rat, and can build up to multiple doses, enough to kill even larger predators or scavengers.

An ecology, however, is a system not only of growth but also, of necessity, of change and decay. What enters the ecology changes the ecology and alters, and could destroy, a local ecology. The poison I use biodegrades harmlessly. But, what is eliminated from the ecology is to be considered as well. Rodents clean up waste. In a balanced ecology, predators clean up rodents. We chose to get rid of rodents. I don't hear the voices of the owls as near, as often, since we destroyed that rat infestation. The owls are still about; I hear them not far away. Other birds have appeared in the ecology.

After the mink murders, I built all subsequent poultry housing with both the poultry and the vermin in mind. As a rule, if not having the luxury of a concrete floor, as was the case in the first coop, coop floors need to be raised at least a foot above the ground. This does not keep rats out of the coop, though it may discourage them from taking up residence. In building our duck house, rather than using piers as I had on other new coops, I had a couple of old pallets I thought I might use to build the duck house on. Not high enough. I just converted my new duck house to a residence that let out the basement to rats.

As the house and vegetable garden determined where farm animals would not be kept, the remainder of our acre still proved to have genius. The other pre-existing building, the woodshed, was, as it should be, only about ten paces from our back door. The lay of the acre is a fairly level narrow wedge of land running south to north in its length. This prompted us to consider the farm in thirds. The front third provided the space of our house and main gardens. The back third, approximately a third of an acre, in amongst the trees, was to be the sheep paddock. The middle third was to be, and in genius of place and good fortune was, the location for the coops and other outbuildings needed on a farm.

Many older home farms are so arranged that the rear of the house forms one of the sides of an enclosed farmyard, or what was called in British English a farmery, an enclosure ringed with these farm home supportive structures. Similar to the ideal kitchen triangle, such a farmyard layout serves as the hub in the farm home's wheel of life. For the older farmer, no vehicles other than a yard cart and good boots are needed to get to and from work.

With the idea and layout of a farmery, structures can be adjoined to other structures. When adding our second chicken coop, for example, the north or far wall of the woodshed served as one wall of the new coop. And incidentally, the small trees that had stood in the spot became the fence rails that were joined to the perimeter fence to create the yard for this coop. This is similar to what was done to share structure between the first chicken coop and the sheep shed. I have since built a hay shed, and feed locker, onto the sheep shed. The goat yard was apportioned alongside the cross fence built for the sheep paddock. The goat shed, too, was built to this fence and adjoins the third chicken coop and yard.

Sometimes buildings get re-purposed. We had room between the goat area and the our kitchen garden for one more farm outbuilding. We had already planned for a guest cottage we would build near this spot, but there was still, as animal houses are small, a spot for one more poultry structure. Wondering whether a next-door rooster would thrill all guests in the cottage, we learned that pheasant were quiet. And, they really didn't need a walled shelter.

You probably know that the ring-necked pheasant, though farmed, is nevertheless a wild bird. You don't see chickens, for example, in the wild. Pheasant, originating in the Orient, remain in the wild, pretty much around the world: it is hard to keep pheasant in captivity. If not purposely released, they seem to always find a way out and fly away. Unlike chickens, they survive in the wild. They don't survive as well in captivity. They don't want to be cooped up for the night. So, varmints find a way in and make take-out meals of pheasant. Of the eight pheasant we were raising, we managed to have two when Christmas came. Knowing this last pair wouldn't last in the pen much longer to allow us to breed them, we decided to eat them.

So, the pheasant shelter was re-purposed and rebuilt to become the third chicken coop. Keeping chickens this close to the cottage was better for any guests than the pigsty I'd originally considered. We like pork, and occasionally beef, but we don't have a farm that can keep pigs or cows. Our few-mile diet remedies that; we buy half a pig from neighbours with some of the proceeds from lamb sales. But, as mentioned earlier, having more chickens better allows for all our egg and chicken meat needs, and pays for the chickens, too.

Simply circling-up the farm buildings, farmery-style, attains the convenience of proximity. Still there are distances between the buildings that can challenge the movements of an older farmer and farm maintenance. This is where, for example, one would not want to haul buckets and buckets of water several days of the week. I keep a one hundred foot garden hose connected year-round to a tap at the back of the house. I attach others to the two taps in the wellhouse. This might not prove practical in a colder climate. As it is, if I forget to turn off and drain the hoses before a freeze, I need to wait for the next thaw. Fortunately, freezing here is typically

infrequent and of short duration. Heat tape is one solution to preventing, or thawing, frozen hoses. A hair dryer works less well.

This brings up the question of outdoor electrical power. Moreover, the home farmer needs to consider if, when, and where electricity is needed. You will note that I'd mentioned one-hundred foot extension cords in the first chapter. I only suggested this because it is something that worked for us, for a while. If one only needs power to certain buildings infrequently, rolling out the long extension cord works quite well. When I first wanted to get power to our chicken coops, to extend light for winter laying, a series of a few extension cords worked well enough, for a short while. It seems that chewing through electrical wires is also a common rodent pastime.

Bared electrical wires are very much a fire hazard. But, I'd become tempted by the winter laying results of supplemental lighting in the chicken coops. Now, all of the coops in the farmery circle have been properly wired. Lighting and electrical outlets are available at any of the buildings. The one-hundred foot cords have been retired.

Ironically, I've now decided to not provide artificial winter light for our chickens. We now keep enough chickens that even winter levels of laying are more than enough for our needs. And it lets chickens enjoy the slower time of the year like we do and, I believe, helps them live, and produce, longer. If you want to more naturally assure winter laying, start some new chicks each Spring. The pullets born in May will be laying by November, and continue laying throughout their first winter.

The power to the coops is still useful, when needed. I do have a red light inside the turkey coop. Turkeys roost at night, but some have an understandable fear of dark enclosures. The red light is enough to get them inside on their own, not requiring otherwise nightly turkey corralling and forced incarceration. In time, even turkeys can be coaxed to go inside at night. Also, red light is much less disturbing to poultry sleep, and the bulb heat, even if not a heat lamp, can help if the flock is small.

There are two additional structures I haven't discussed with regard to openings and enclosures. I did mention the duck house, not saying that it was built within

the kitchen garden. Placing it there is not because we ran out of space in the farmyard, but that a vegetable garden is a complementary place for ducks. Ducks are probably one of the best garden pest control systems a farm might have. You just need to keep them focussed on the pests and not the vegetables. Our system of raised beds meant that the ducks preferred grubbing for bugs around the bases of the raised beds to eating our vegetables. Ducks have short legs and short flight capability. Our ducks tended to stay off the top of the beds, though succulent greens were regularly trimmed from the edges of the beds, about a duck's-neck length in. And, oh yes, before the ducks arrived, I used to mow the paths between the beds. Ducks keep the grass and weeds down. These feathered gardeners also render eggs and, at the end of a season or few, tasty meals.

Heed well, however. Once ducks learn of the succulent salad in raised beds, they will make repeated jumps into the beds. I fence them into the orchard and blueberry patch where they stay all spring and summer until I let them in the vegetable garden to clean up after harvest. A good cue in spring as to when to fence the ducks out of the garden is when rhubarb starts to emerge; it is as much a spring treat for ducks as much as it is for us. Unlike us, ducks can eat the leaves with impunity. (Leaves are poisonous to us, but can be used in solution as an organic insecticide, if you are an old-school organic grower. If ducks eat the rhubarb leaves, that leaves no rhubarb stalks, which people do eat, for us.)

In the spring and summer, until the fall harvest, the farmer takes over kitchen garden maintenance. As I've now allowed grass and other native plants to grow in our kitchen garden, I find the paths I tread keep the growth between the beds not needing mowing. Mowing, to me, is a cosmetic burden, like shaving.

Most of my discussion of enclosures and openings in this chapter confined itself to a rather two-dimensional look at the layout and design of our home farm. Just as a farm must follow the advice of the immediate environment and ecology, the farm home is part of the larger environment. Beneath the ground, good soil with good drainage is as much a part of the farm as anything on the surface. Likewise, there is an environment above, and beyond, the environment of any farm as part of its ecology. There must be water above and below the ground. Fresh air must reach into the soil for growth to occur. There must be light to reach for.

The natural ecology, in the vicissitudes of weather and world behaviours, will always challenge the home farmer. From knowing which way the winds blow, and the inclinations of the sun, to getting to know the habits of winged predators, to not wanting a coal mine nearby, the farmer and fellow humans are key variables in furthering farm life. But, remember, too, in the social environment, you are likely to have neighbours who will never understand why, in the age of supermarkets, you would grow your own food, particularly food that quacks, or bleats, or crows or makes different scents to them than the sense it all makes to you.

Even if you are in an area zoned for agriculture, neighbours still might not want you next door. While we have generally been accepted, as we are not far from several other farms of varying sizes, one neighbour, when we first brought in chickens, thought he would fight noise with noise. He started up his lawnmower and left it running parked in the forest outside the fence otherwise separating our properties, in January. He actually did this more than once. At first, knowing we were in the right, we ignored him. My psychologist's mind, after unfairly quick diagnosis, decided it might help to talk with him. However, as the privacy fence stopped neither the sound of chickens, nor his gales of profanity, we decided to continue to ignore him. He then reported us to bylaw officers as having excessively barking dogs, which would have been a bylaw infraction, had it been true. It helps to get to know civic officials. And, it helped that they knew our neighbour already, and knew him to be difficult even on good days.

Unfortunately, the bylaw officers' visits with the neighbour only gave him a new way he thought he might retaliate. One day I heard East Indian music wafting over the fence. It was rather meditative at first, but was less so when it became a newscast, in Punjabi. It is not Punjabi that would offend me. I like to listen so well that I have come to prefer understanding what I am listening to.

This same neighbour had earlier thought to launch a volley of very loud music over the fence. Thinking of, I'm guessing, the music that would offend old people in the childhood he'd never left when he became middle-aged, he blared us with Jimi Hendrix. He was trying to offend an old hippie. What was he thinking? He wasn't thinking about the response his noise would evoke from the poultry whose noise he was protesting. Domestic fowl, particularly turkeys, get quite vocal about

loud and unusual noises. I believe some of the fowl noises he protested were the results of him arriving home in his foul truck with his loud music.

A Punjabi newscast was my prompt to claim our right as farmers. We reported the neighbour to the by-law officer. A short while later I received a telephone call from the bylaw supervisor, a woman I'd met earlier. She said she was calling to apologise. She went on to explain that, in trying to explain to our neighbour that we were entitled to keep the chickens, including roosters, had illustrated her explanation with a similar neighbourhood noise battle she'd dealt with. It seems she told him that one of the neighbours in that dispute had used a loud radio to get back at that neighbour's crowing roosters. Our neighbour missed the point that the too-loud radio was a noise bylaw violation. He was not aware of the steep fines for such violation of the noise by-laws. She said she'd correct this. We haven't heard more than a peep from Mr. Noyes in over five years.

While we may not be able to choose our human neighbours, nature is a neighbourhood we choose to get along in. So, as I opened this chapter with the admonition to not see nature as doors and windows, but as enclosures and openings, let me return indoors to get a window on how the house relates to the rest of the farm on a home farm. Certainly we want to have as positive a view of our farm as possible from the literal windows. But, just as city dwellings are constrained by their built environment – tending to be smaller to fit the small plot of land, or built as large as the plot allows by removing any land – the house for a small farm needs to address and serve any gap between home and farm.

Enclosures and openings for the farmhouse:

- Where to prepare, preserve and store food;
- Where to store, use, and service tools and equipment;
- Where and how to best ensure that most farm dirt remains as soil outside;
- Where and how to host all the people that will want to visit the paradise that is a farm home.



# The Hearth of the Home

For the beginning home farmer, the digital age has made research and learning much easier, though perhaps not better, than it was for our agrarian forebears. As a compromise between then and now, I am fascinated by the domestic history found in digitized antiquarian books, resources that present-day home farmers literally could not likely have handed down or otherwise get their hands on.

In its earliest forms a farmhouse was housing for all farm residents. A ‘house-barn’ had two doors. These were not the front and back doors, but one door for the people, and another for the livestock. Farmers and farm animals lived together under the same roof. Sometimes it was side-by-side; sometimes it was humans upstairs, animals downstairs. Can’t get much closer to the source of your food than that. And there was extra heat for the home. This live heating system was the thinking of early farmers, and stabling one’s livestock the house lessened the chance of animal thievery. I hope I’ve made clear by our farmery implications that our livestock have their own houses and we, and our pets, are the only animals we will have living inside our house.

What is most striking about old farm architecture is how the home was built to interface with the farm. The rooms fulfilled the functions of an agrarian lifestyle. The rooms of our present day places of residence are mere vestiges of these rooms, our homes fulfilling not much more than lodging for the night and room for entertainment. The major outside interest of modern homes seems proximity to civilisation and the view. The home is often centred on things away from home. The farmhouse serves to centre us on the nature of farming. And, of needs be, the hearth of yesteryear’s farm is the centre of farm home function.

Before central heating (before even living with livestock), the nexus with the environment was the home fire, solidified as a hearth. Like me, you might like that the word hearth, though otherwise unrelated to the word heart, certainly alludes to that central fire alight in our breasts. Imagine the further fondness I've developed for the inclusive word hearth, a word that merges heart and earth, and heat and art.

Fire is the means that humans have adapted most to help us overcome our limits in the environment. We overcome cold. We use heat to make otherwise inedible things edible and more palatable. Our forebears learned the use of fire for forge and foundry, for apothecary and preservation, and to dispose of unwanted things. Combustion engines are but fires we contain to do whatever we are moved to do.

On today's home farm, the element of fire is honoured first in its solar form, learning how to use the sun's heat and light most directly and most effectively. These include south-facing windows and heat sinks, mass that retains heat, such as concrete slabs and trombe walls, along with ample insulation. Our farm benefits greatly by our solar situation though, like our forebears in similar northern climes, we need additional ways internal to the house to heat and cook, including having hot water.

If we were to be building a new house, there are alternative means of heat and energy capture and retention we could include. (We have done this in the guest cottage we've built.) As is for us, and for many, whatever house you have becomes your farmhouse. The attention and attending we provide to how the house helps us most effectively and efficiently conduct an agrarian lifestyle is what optimises farm home ecology. Certainly, you may wish to retrofit a home that is not energy-efficient, and this includes efficient use of one's own energy.

Whereas the original hearth in a house was, at once, from where the house was heated and where food was cooked, we have a clear early connection that existed between house and environment. The fuel and food the farm environs provided to sustain was processed in, and by, the hearth. Those functions have been separated in what we call progress. With central heating we no longer need to gather around a hearth. We no longer need more than a microwave to 'cook' our food. We can

stay warm and fed independent of our hearths. Why, many a contemporary home doesn't even have a hearth.

More than the literal warmth and cooking done around a hearth, many homes have lost reasons, other than sleep, to bring the inhabitants together. Our farmhouse has begun to put everything we do together, with us, for us.

So central was the hearth for our domestic forbears that, for some, a small enclosure called an inglenook was built around it. While 'ingle' is from an Old English word for fire, it is related to the word 'angel'. This closeness to heaven was not lost on those gathering in an inglenook.

Our house is old enough to have a hearth. While it includes now an energy-efficient wood stove, the brick and stone hearth still radiates warmth to the whole house in place of our central heating being turned on. When feeling cold, close to the hearth is always best. Somewhat unusual about our fireplace is that the surround includes a useful opening to a wood box attached to the outside of the house. While the original opening was open, it made for a second chimney, sucking the rooms' heat out through the wood box. I made a little wooden door for the opening.

As it is, our hearth would need to be somewhat larger, and modified, if we wanted to use it to allow cooking as well as complete heating for our home, or to include an inglenook. Yet, we do often forget that in winter the wood stove could heat a teakettle or a pot of soup. Our wood stove is not, and was never considered to be, more than an auxiliary heat source. Our electric furnace and the heat pump we added are the primary means for temperature control in the house. What we have found in winter is that the wood stove is quite sufficient to keep the heating system idle but for its circulation fan

And, I get extra warmth when I cut, split, and haul the firewood, and when warming my backside at the hearth after doing so.

While households now have kitchens for cooking, the contemporary kitchen is often insufficient, as is, to support the food activities and food storage needed for a farm home. We were fortunate that our house had a kitchen of adequate size to create a country kitchen. Still, as the farm home is all about food, there are food

considerations that require that we look all about the house for ways to expand and amplify the capacity of the kitchen.

It was common up through the 19th century for farmhouses, even common farmhouses, to devote multiple rooms to food needs. While most, other than manor houses, would not have or need a separate scullery to wash dishes or to do laundry, they had other rooms to support the kitchen. Some present day domiciles may have the laundry appliances in the kitchen. Conversely, for many apartment dwellers, there is no laundry in the home at all. Why, the popular galley kitchens of city living barely have room for the kitchen appliances, hence, we have ‘apartment-size’ appliances.

If a larger home has a pantry, it is typically a closet, not the room it used to be. The word pantry belies an early connection to bread (cf. the French ‘pain’). I doubt that any pantry was ever used solely as an over-sized breadbox. In addition to a place to keep bread, the pantry was a place to store the ingredients to make the bread, and to make bread, and on to storing many dry goods. And the pantry was the storeroom most supermarket shoppers now only need cupboards for. While there are only my wife and me in our home, we have found that cupboards, even the number we have built-in, are not enough for such things as baking our own bread.

Since shortly after moving to our farm, I began to bake bread for us. It took so little time, I wondered why I did it so infrequently in the past. But, I knew how, and liked, to make bread. We began to buy flours and sugar in 10kg sacks. In our kitchen, since no cupboard is large enough for these provisions, we have a Hoosier cabinet.

The Hoosier was a cabinet manufactured in the American state of Indiana (the Hoosier State) in the early part of the 20th century. The emergence coincides, coincidentally, with the population shifting from the farm to the city. There were Hoosiers before this, when Americans were shifting from the colony to the frontier. Coincidental to the meaning of the denonym, ‘Hoosier’, albeit the origins are many, is the notion of a country person, and all that entails. Indiana, of course, means ‘land of the Indians’, war-takings usurped for the cultivation of Western

values. Try to ignore that this particular West was already home to a culture. The American frontier was manifest destiny seen as destinations. Many and much was destined.

I digress to progress. The frontier family brought their kitchens, and culture, with them. In essence, a Hoosier cabinet is a portable pantry. It was built not only as storage for staples and spices, but also as a workstation for baking. It was modeled, in fact, on an earlier baker's cabinet. Not only does a Hoosier afford storage space for the home baker, it also contains besides flour bins, a sifter, and a metal countertop, usually enameled, which slides out for use and back when not in use.

As we prefer to prepare our own foods, rather than paying somebody to prepare them in ways we may not like, our Hoosier has become essential to how we cook and bake.

Oh, as flour is now typically pre-sifted, the metal sifter in a Hoosier can serve as a nifty storage compartment. It is where I put our egg money. Over the several months when the hens lay a surplus of eggs, we sell 6-8 dozen, or more, per week. Now that I've told you where the egg money is, I have to go count it. The last time I counted the cash there was over \$500. That *is* chicken feed.

When manufactured, the Hoosier cabinet was marketed as "a pantry and kitchen in one". That Hoosiers have gone out of style is partly because people, and kitchens, and lifestyles and culture, changed. Paradoxically, as kitchens for many got larger, people began to bake and to cook less at home. Or, more exactly, in a prepared food world, food only need be heated at home, not prepared. As Leslie Anne and I have chosen to grow much of our own food, it makes sense to choose also to prepare it.

Processing food at home may mean the addition of small, versatile home appliances. One of the most versatile is aptly named a food processor. While I do advocate for hand tools in the kitchen garden, mechanical and electrical appliances in the kitchen are time-saving for those who, while having more free time in later years, may have little lifetime for tedious kitchen chores. Not only does the food processor chop, slice, and dice fruits and vegetables, grate cheese, make soups, prepare jams, and make bread dough, it saves money and time, and space.

We could probably get by with this one appliance, though we also have a few other small appliances we use regularly – a toaster, a coffeemaker, a microwave oven. We also acquired a dehydrator and an ice cream maker. We own, as well, many quaint older mechanical appliances— a meat grinder, a nut chopper, a cherry pitter, and such – though we only occasionally use these. But I did tell you about power outages, right?

The reality of outfitting a home farm kitchen is having places to have everything in its place. Hence the return of spaces in the home related to food storage and preparation, which may even challenge a ‘country kitchen’. Fortunately, our Hoosier fits in our kitchen, so a separate pantry, per se, has not been needed. But we do need a larder. The terms pantry and larder have been used interchangeably, although there is, historically, a distinction: a pantry was typically for goods to be kept dry and for food preparation, a larder for goods to be kept cool, especially meat. In today’s world, the kitchen, originally meant for cooking only, becomes pantry, larder, dairy, buttery (not what it sounds like), root cellar and kitchen. It became so with the advent of refrigerators and freezers. In most homes these traditional rooms were turned into a single electrical appliance in a corner of the kitchen.

So, what space is available as a larder if you don’t want to rely on the power needed by refrigerators and freezers? Some folks had a root cellar or a springhouse. A younger farmer might be enthralled by these options. Some homes still have basements or, at least, crawl spaces. Will these keep food cool? That would be cool.

Most of today’s basements are too insulated to have a cool enough location. If you have a basement, try it out. Basements are generally dry, too, but not all of them and not everywhere. Our wet climate had us growing unwanted fungi in the basement of an older house we once rented. Or, how about using a crawl space? I started out my life crawling; I don’t intend to go back. I tried, nonetheless, storing our first potato crop just inside our crawlspace. What potatoes did not rot, sprouted.

We quickly found that one refrigerator with its combined freezer would not be sufficient for our home farm. We bought a small freezer that we set up out in our then carport. That was first to accommodate the meat from our lambs and chickens, and a half of pork we'd purchased. We also needed another refrigerator to free up our refrigerator.

Now I ask you, how much milk or eggs are in your refrigerator? I'm guessing that at any one time, in most contemporary homes, there are, at most, one or two dozen eggs and two to four litres of milk. Our farm gives us approximately one to two dozen eggs per day. Two milk goats yield up to four or five litres of milk per day. Even feeding milk to our two dogs, our cat, and to chickens doesn't obviate the need for more space than even a large refrigerator would afford. Although, and contrary to general practice, while eggs need to be kept somewhat cool, they do not need to be refrigerated, as long as the 'bloom' is not washed off. Nonetheless, we purchased a second refrigerator. And we bought a second, larger freezer, too.

In our carport that I then enclosed along with a toolshed, hoping that it would eventually become a workshop, are now two freezers and a refrigerator. In planning now is to build a proper larder (cold room) on the cool north back of the carport. And, as I've also started fermenting fruit for my own wine and brewing beer, the larder would also serve as our buttery. A buttery, related to butler, and to bottles, was the place where these libations were formerly and properly stored.

A side note about the carport: while we did initially use it to park one of our two vehicles out of the weather, we found we needed the space more for other farm uses than as an umbrella for an automobile. As snowfall is seldom here, and generally light, outdoor parking for vehicles is just fine. Other farm homes may need a garage, and a machine shed, especially if the farm requires a tractor.

I've long had an interest in how one's home relates to the elemental world. I am referring to the classical four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The house in a farm home is best, I believe, when sensitive and responsive to these elements and their relationships. Each of the elements is, if you think about it, a form of energy,

potential and kinetic, especially when two or more of these meet. A home farm needs to be a gathering place of the elements.

One aspect of the elements is their many correspondences: most basically, fire to heat, earth to cold, water to wet, air to dry. Was it not for the elements being, and being in reciprocation, there could be no life, no farm, no home. Organic life is impossible without the ever-renewing balancing act of the elements; and, equilibrium is death.

These elements, in all their manifestations, are all the life we'll ever know. As older home farmers, we have fewer harvests ahead than the years gone could have enjoyed. Can't think of a better time to get closer to the elements we've enjoyed in life. A young comedian has quipped that he wondered why so many older people get into gardening in their later years. He deduced we are getting accustomed to dirt. Living on a home farm means getting accustomed to dirt, more for life purposes than prepping for death. Just as everything has its elemental time, everything must have its elemental place, especially on a small home farm.

As domestic life radiated from the hearth to become the many places we needed to provide our safety, shelter, and food, little domestic life may remain for many. Particularly, this became true as cities extended and contracted our safety, shelter, and sources of food. We may have over-extended ourselves; we have lost a sense of centre, have greatly lost a sense of home. How could we expect to live a 'balanced' life?

To reclaim life in our lifetimes, our home farm is serving to reduce the distances we'd become accustomed to for our sources of safety, shelter, and food. Getting closer to how we live is the best response in getting closer to how we die.

To speak of distances, and a desire to reduce these, is about getting closer to true nature. In the security and safety measures of what we call a civilised world, the world we've cut out of nature, we equate sanity with sanitised: the whole of nature, we've seemingly concluded, is elementally unsanitary. Nature is removed from the possibility of sanity.

Home farming is harnessing fire to heat and to burn but not at the same time. Home farming is knowing how and when to use and not to use water. Home farm-

ing is fresh air and wind and the smell of decay. Home farming is the life-giving soil, manure, and the dirt on your skin and in your house.

An elemental house, to be a farm home, builds itself to turn the building inside out, if you will. I am not suggesting goats in the kitchen, an attached greenhouse, or even a composting toilet. Elemental flow is more about what comes into the house, what goes out, how it enters, and how it leaves.

Let me illustrate by talking about the exterior doors in our house. Not counting the small woodbox door in our hearth I spoke of, or the pet door in the sunroom, or the cat door in the workshop, there are four exterior doors into and out of our house proper. In addition to a customary front door, we have a double doors and a sidedoor into the workshop (carport), double doors to a back deck, and double doors to the sunroom. In two of these cases, the doors to the workshop and sunroom used to connect directly with the outside. So, now, for now, only the front door and rear deck doors open straightway to the outside.

Certainly the elements of fire (in the form of sunlight) and air (at times) pass through the house's windows. In addition, heat and air pass in and out of a house through diffusion and a ventilation system. This is true, or should be true, for any inhabited space.

What comes and goes in and out of doors is a further matter on the home farm. I speak first of the reality that, on a home farm, the extra amount of dirt on the outside of the house is always trying to seek equilibrium with the dirt on the inside. Doorways are key suspects.

Attending to our gardens and animals, I rarely use the front door. I usually come and go through the rear deck doors. Though Leslie Anne and I will go in and out of the front door when leaving or arriving, to work in the flower garden, Leslie keeps a pair of garden shoes on the front porch. I think she wishes I would.

We both may use the side door into the workshop, to then exit the workshop onto the farm. The good news is that, just inside the door leading to the workshop is our laundry room and a washroom. So, in theory, less dirt need enter the house much further than this. While some dirt does make its way into the sunroom, on

the other end of the house, as an anteroom with a sisal rug that acts like a large doormat, some dirt is diverted from entering the house.

The elemental problem with the back door is it is both the way onto the farm and the farm's way onto the floors and furnishings of the house. Oh, and I forgot to mention that both sets of double doors, out to the deck and into the sunroom, are in the dining room.

This is where I recommend something we've yet to do ourselves: add a mudroom. The traditional cottage door typically opened to a small porch, not the house proper. If, like us, your home farm includes domestic pets, cats and, particularly, dogs, are active earthmovers. Our dogs go in and out with me every time I go onto the farm, and at other times on their own. I sometimes wipe my feet when coming in. Dogs, if weighed before crossing the threshold on our rainy days would, I swear, contain a heft of wet dirt doubling their going-out weight.

While contemplating a mudroom, the home farmer is wise to see if such a room might also serve to wash dogs, and vegetables, and fruits, and eggs. I'm not one for coveralls, but such a room could also keep outdoor wear and gear. It could be a boot room. I'll try to remind myself of these uses.

I've talked about the movement of earth in and out of the farmhouse, and touched upon the aspects of heat and air. Keeping water out of the house makes sense, until we talk about plumbing. Many a home farm, like ours, has a well and a septic system. The water coming into and going out the farmhouse deserves much more attention than we ever give to water in a city environment. Watering bans and boil-water advisories aside, water in many North American cities is taken for granted and used mindlessly. That will change. The home farmer who relies on a well and a septic system, even if prone to forgetfulness, is afforded reminders.

While we'd experienced power outages in cities, the power outages to our home farm have been more frequent and lasted longer than any I've recalled while in a city. I bring this up not particularly to talk more about dependency on electricity as elemental fire, but to point out that electric water pumps do not operate during power outages: no electricity, no water. While this at first concerned us with respect to having water for farm animals, this is not a significant problem, for the ani-

mals. As power outages occur here during storms, there is typically rainwater or, occasionally snow, which will suffice their drinking needs temporarily. We have, nonetheless, barrels on hand that I could convert to a cistern system. For the farm household, however, short of filling the bathtub before such storms, the house is without water coming in or going out.

In our third year here, the forty-year-old electric water pump failed. And, not much later, our septic system backed up. These were easily corrected, if not cheaply, but it gave us an appreciation for my home's fresh water and 'wastewater' role and capacity. We got to appreciate, too, how our water did not come from a municipal reservoir. Our underground aquifer, or rather two, as I learned from our well guy, offers not only plentiful water but also some of the purest water on the planet. While looking for a place to farm, water availability was certainly on the list, knowing that on many of the smaller islands near Vancouver Island groundwater is scarce, at best.

The farm home, and especially the farmhouse, contains nature. Nature, in its fullness, is felt and made present when we are attuned to the sensitivity and sources and interplay of earth, air, fire, and water. The farmhouse, and home farm as a whole, in the greater whole, is an attempt, too, to support and control what the elements can do. But it is not magic, unless you understand magic as working in accord with the elements. But, perhaps, we're just old, eco-centric fools. At least, we have a good hearth and it's in the right place.



# The Kitchen Garden

Isn't kitchen garden just a pretentious name for a vegetable garden? If you grow vegetables for your own kitchen, and not to market these, then your vegetable garden is a kitchen garden. Although, if you only grow vegetables - no fruits, no herbs, no flowers - then your vegetable garden may not be a kitchen garden. The kitchen garden at Croft Farm is indeed where we grow vegetables for our own use, but more for our kitchen, and home, grows there, too.

There are twenty raised beds in which our vegetables grow, nearly 1500 square feet of vegetable growing. There are also two beds of strawberries, four rows of raspberries, ten black currant bushes and one red, thirty blueberry bushes, thirteen apple trees, an espaliered pear tree, two plum trees, four cherry trees, a fig tree, grape and kiwi vines, assorted other berries, a perennial herb garden, and two hazelnut shrubs. As a kitchen garden is also called a potager, from the French word for soup, our kitchen garden, it can be said, grows everything from soup to nuts.

So, a kitchen garden is more properly the place where you grow as much of your kitchen needs as you can. This growing area, for us, comprises approximately twenty-five percent of our acre. But, to be honest, as meat eaters, and consumers of egg and dairy, bakers and brewers, our entire farm nourishes us. That is, our kitchen grows in and all around our kitchen garden.

As our kitchen garden is conveniently separated from house and animals, except ducks, I will treat it as a separate but equal unit of the home farm. Also, I like to spread the idea that, in calling it a kitchen garden, the space in the name - between kitchen and garden - becomes a very small distance with a very big connection.

As it is a quarter of our farm, the kitchen gardens of the monasteries and manor houses where the kitchen garden developed were equally sizable proportions of the monastery or manor house grounds. It is with this perspective that the notion of calling this hobby farming becomes an oxymoron. Inherent in the notion of a kitchen garden is that the tenders and tenants of the home farm do this as vocation, a life calling, not as avocation. This cannot be hobby farming. It must be habitat farming. It could be habit farming.

There is no greater life calling than feeding oneself and others. Yet, it is not the mere act of growing vegetables and fruits that is the calling. The true calling is that of life more basic and pure. Tending to life that becomes our food tends us to see life in ways no religion, science, or philosophy could ever adequately inform. It is through growing food that life, and time, and death, and love, make sense.

One key way to assure that the kitchen garden is more than a productivity exercise is to invoke what truly makes a kitchen garden distinct from a vegetable garden. The distinction is not in what is grown solely but in the beauty of growing.

While a vegetable garden could and should be a thing of beauty, the kitchen garden is, double entendre doubly intended, a seedbed of beauty. The aesthetics of the kitchen garden are as essential as what is grown there. In this, living beauty is manifest in what is grown, how and where it is grown, welcoming places for flowers, edible or not; it is in the garden structures and appliances, in the birds and bees and butterflies that attend, and on out to the garden fences. And beyond.

The beauty is rooted in what grows well. Reminded that agriculture is seldom a natural occurrence, the home farmer conducts an annual experiment, well informed or not, to conjure the beauty and the bounty. For the older home farmer, particularly one who is a neophyte farmer, there are very few seasons left to get it right. Fortunately, I am at an age where I'm more interested in doing things well than getting things right. And, anyway, wellness and beauty are not always what we are told is the right thing to do.

Regardless, it is most helpful to regard the wisdom and experience of farmers and gardeners who have learned before you. Such resources are available for the looking and asking, and I heartily encourage you, as I was encouraged, to get to

know about growing food first by other's experience before learning from one's own. Of first acquaintance might be the nature of what native plants grow in your region, their needs and habits, and then to especially consult those food growers who have successfully grown food in your part of the world.

I can tell you about my experience, so far, in the temperate but wet climate of the east coast of Vancouver Island. I arrived here with the experience of, successfully or not, growing a variety of plants and vegetables in a variety of North American environments. The peanuts and sweet potatoes I grew in North Carolina, the corn and tomatoes I grew in Ohio, or the citrus fruit that grew outside my California home will not grow, without difficulty and some expense, here on Vancouver Island. There are some foods, blueberries and hazelnuts for examples, that grow very well here, and not elsewhere. Much food can be grown in such a temperate climate as we enjoy. I have come to think of the best diet for humans as what is possible to be grown or raised (or gathered) annually and seasonally in the region where the humans live. This means there could never be just one locavore diet.

On the subject of a locavore diet, we will never likely be purists, unless trade ends. While we are concerned about the distance our food travels to our plates, as growing our own food would imply, we enjoy and hope to continue to enjoy foodstuff that has travelled the globe for centuries, and ideally food produced by responsible stewards of the earth. We love our morning coffee, rice with our meals, citrus fruits, chocolate, and such. While the distances these travel to be our enjoyment are not without concern, the greater concern is the circuitous and unnecessary side-trips food takes to our doors. Soy, corn, and sugar are foods we use. We do not need these to be made into multi-coloured breakfast concoctions, into snacks no matter how crunchy, nor into squeezable food products. We don't need our rice to be a meal-in-a-pouch, nor our coffee to come flavoured in pods. Our diet may not travel the shortest distance, but it does travel the straightest lines.

The greater goal than growing everything you think you need to eat is growing what grows well in your region, eating seasonally, and only buying (or bartering) what you can't grow from as close to home as you can find it. Exotic fruits and vegetables are nice taste excursions, but not necessary to the diet in constant quantities. And some staple foods, like organic corn, peas, dried beans, tomatoes, and

flour are available throughout North America in quantities and at prices you might never grow well.

This is not to say that many foods that might grow very well in your region are always easy to grow in your region. Nor does this mean, even with bountiful gardens, that anyone would necessarily be able to grow enough of her or his dietary needs on a home farm, especially on one as small as ours. We still shop for groceries on a fairly regular basis. It is just that, when we do go food shopping, there are many foods we eat that we no longer buy at the grocery store, except when the homegrown foods run low.

We rarely buy meat. I know, vegetarians can one-up us on that. My point is, of the foods we eat, meat is one that we have largely come to supply more directly than from a supermarket. We love carrots, but haven't had to get them from any store but our garden. Carrots continue to grow (or at least live) year round here. I pick them live and fresh in the dead of winter. By the early summer, when last year's carrots are going to seed, new carrots are ready for picking. The same is nearly true here for other root vegetables and some brassicas, like cabbage. I have not quite yet grown all the potatoes or onions we eat so, for a portion of the year, we do eat store-bought potatoes and onions. Growing our own food brings awareness of how much of something we eat through the seasons. Some salad greens, normally thought a spring and early summer food, are available fresh from the garden into and through our winters. I easily grow a year's supply of garlic.

The small farm puts more limits on quantity than on quality. Unless one is obsessed with high yields in small spaces at any cost, a kitchen garden of our size can potentially feed the two of us throughout the year. Just not necessarily all year, every year. We have just begun having a harvest of tree fruit, to harvest as we have berries from the beginning. Our fruit stock is coming of age. We will, in a short while, have plenty of our own fruit. I have never really been a person of patience, but as an older person I have learned to wait. Farming in old age has helped me to believe in a future. The fruit trees will bear after my future.

As with us, a kitchen garden, has a lifecycle. To receive life from our gardens we must feed and support them. From our own physical labour with the living soil

we need to nourish and nurture an annual promise of produce. For longer-lived perennials, like fruit trees, nourish and nurture still apply. Though fruit trees are slower to show their appreciation, having picked tree fruit as a younger man I know what mature fruiting looks like.

Some may still be of the mind that what we are doing is not really farming. The production of food is only a farm, it has been assumed, when done on a larger scale and to create a salable crop, or at least a salable surplus. The salable surplus we've experienced so far has largely been given away to friends and neighbours; how can a farm survive like that, some may wonder? The only reason farmers had to farm for other than their own family and friends was when, for whatever reasons, these others were not farming for themselves. Once we grew food for a world that quit growing food for themselves, we grew to a population that has outgrown home farming.

Our kitchen garden recalls, and returns where it might, the potential, at least, that more of us might feed ourselves rather than trying to feed all of us. Selfish? Perhaps. We are all selfish. Self defines being human as much as does being social. The kitchen garden, and home farm, is a selfish way to be social.

Some of you are thinking I've changed the subject. If the subject has been changed it is in the change of consciousness that both the idea and act of growing our own food has brought us as we grow older. Some might now think there must be better ways to feed our elderly than expecting them to grow their own food. I'm glad you think that way. For now, I can't think of a better way than farming for me to live in my old age. Many older people cannot do this. I have no idea how long we will be able to live by home farming. I'm guessing it's longer than other ways we might try to feed ourselves.

We've come to the point. The point is actually in the actions of farming. It is the point of shovels and of rakes, of hoes and hands. Others may choose, or feel they need to choose, machines to do the work of farming. Technology is needed, but it need not require machine technology. The only machine that entered our kitchen garden was a small ride-on mower to trim the grass between the orchard and berry rows. Then the ducks did that work. Now my feet keep the wild growth

passable. I do the rest of the farm work with hands and hand tools. Just as we seek to make minimal the distance from garden to kitchen in our home, home farming is also about reducing the distance between one's body and the body of earth. Before we become soil ourselves, we are able to work with the earth to best make life possible.

As we age, of course, our biomechanics do not respond as well, as quickly, and for as long as we once did or still wish they might. Nature, I've figured, moves more slowly than we have been moving most of our lives. Nature's way of slowing us down may be the only way to actually know Nature. It helps that the raised beds in our kitchen garden are raised a bit closer to me, and that I can sit on their edges. Long handled gardening tools, including hand tools, do any needed reaching.

Simple tools, like a broadfork, become the only tool needed to till the vegetable beds. The tilling I do is minimal. Once a year, I sift in aged manure and wood ash with the broadfork. I do need a shovel and wheeled cart to get the manure from the animal enclosures into the garden. I hereby recommend a garden cart over a wheelbarrow for the aging home farmer. As long as spaces are made wide enough where wheeled in material is needed, older legs and arms alike appreciate the balance of two wheels.

The work done in the garden is best when it makes later work less needed. Raised beds, close planting and intercropping, and pest-deterring and growth-affecting companion planting are all ways to reduce the need to weed. Some weeds are companion plants in that they seem to appear with certain vegetables. So, as long as they are not taking too much space or taking over, we ignore them. They are often helping the garden - fixing nitrogen or accumulating nutrients. Weeds, it is said, are plants growing where we don't want them, and for which we don't yet know their use. We destroy them in these situations, or if we feel they are crowding out the plants we do want. Sometimes 'weeds' go away on their own when the vegetables exert dominance. We do occasionally weed our garden beds, particularly as vegetables emerge, and even enjoy doing so. In the light tith of the raised beds, lifting weeds is easy. As I hand pluck each weed start, I query my garden and Mother Nature: 'She loves me?... she loves me not?'

The only pesticide we've had to use is...oh, to talk again about rats and mice. Until there were too many rats and mice who liked our garden as much or more than we did, we only saw one insect threat. Oh, yes, I occasionally find nibblings by bugs and birds and bunnies, but I've planted part of the garden for them so there will be as much as we need left. Once I did find aphids on one of the char-treuse spiraled heads of one of my Romanesco cauliflower, and Leslie Anne found aphids on a rosebush. A little spray of dish detergent in water took back our plantings. We could have used rhubarb water. That is the only pesticide we've used other than rat poison.

Just as we have to work for a living, it is advisable to have our gardens work for us when they are old enough. Pole beans have the job of trellising and shading pumpkins and squash, raspberry canes grow at just the right pace to let spring sun coax the neighbouring salad bed, and later shade summer sun to keep greens cool and slow to bolt and grow bitter. Peas loosen the soil for the carrots to more easily dig in for a full life. As carrots don't particularly care for much manure, they are left to till their own beds, which they do quite well. We sprinkle wood ash on the surface in early spring and the rain and growing carrots work it into the soil. We planted scarlet runner beans once near our weeping cherry tree, whose branches soon became a living trellis, with scarlet blossoms until autumn. When making new beds, we put in manure and other rotting material like wood, both to nourish over a longer term and to aid in moisture retention.

As to watering, we have come to just using a hand-held hose nozzle. There is little gain to the garden in watering garden paths with sprinkler systems. When needed, when the soil is no longer wet two inches down, we go out in the evening and do a walking watering meditation, listening the whispering prayers of the garden hose.

We did install drip irrigation for our tomato beds, but even these are watered with the hose now, softly aimed at the ground around their feet rather than overhead. In general, tomatoes don't like to get wet, but they do drink lots of water. Take note: the black plastic of irrigation tends to weaken and rupture at joints, and drip holes clog.

In order for a farmer to be outstanding in this field, one can't stand around expecting the garden to garden itself, even though it will; the older farmer can find ways to make the work of gardening easier for oneself and for the garden.

You may know that the traditional kitchen garden was a walled garden. The kitchen garden as we know it arose in Europe, and particularly in the British Isles, where the garden wall was not merely a barrier or affectation, but a working part of the garden. The wall moderates the climate of the growing environment. While our kitchen garden is not walled, the high fence, neighbouring buildings, and the embrace of tall trees do serve in much the same way as a garden wall. The arrangement of tall versus shorter plants is done, too, with the idea of creating micro-climates. Sometimes, for some plants you wish to grow for food, walls and even roofs are needed. Such is the case for heat-loving plants in our part of the world. We like growing out of doors as much as we can, so we have little interest or room for greenhouse growing, per se. Tomatoes and peppers are an exception.

So, after our first growing season when the season was long enough but not hot enough to allow only a large crop of green tomatoes before the rains came, I converted two adjoining raised beds into a tomato house. Using recycled windows and a clear polycarbon roof, tomatoes and peppers could now have it drier and hotter like they like. Making the windows removable allows needed temperature modulation and cross-ventilation.

Buildings and taller existing or planted foliage provide windbreaks and heat sinks to create spaces to grow some things that are finicky. For example, though we are near to the sea, and the herb rosemary means 'rose of the sea', our earliest starts of rosemary, in a pot or in the ground, were failing. Albeit good drainage is a big factor for rosemary, it likes moist, but well-drained soil as much as it likes warmth and salty air. And, apparently, rosemary likes to be close to other plants, especially other herbs, and especially if these form, or are near, a fence.

One reason to not have a garden wall is so passersby can see the garden. More than to show it off, or even to show what is possible, food growing is a show many people never get to see. And, as the kitchen garden is different than many a vegetable garden, for its attention to aesthetics, such beauty should not be confined to

works of art, nor a work of art like a garden be confined from anyone other than pests and predators. While some of your neighbours might be pests, or predators, it is more likely that they could need your garden, too.

If it is for the needed nourishment in beauty, or in inspiration, our kitchen garden is shared even if or when we never have surplus to sell. The home farm is a gateway to thinking about how people live. The farm gate is more than a place of produce for sale. Even a so-called self-sufficient farm is never sufficient unto itself. As home farmers, we need others and will until after we die. We need to assure that our farm gate is welcoming. It is only closed to allow farming to occur behind it.

Sharing food, and sharing in farming, was long integral to friendship and community. Even the most 'community-minded' market can't replace this. The route from any garden to your kitchen is a farm gate best crossed with ones feet touching the ground, never empty-handed.



# Taking Stock

You may have noticed an essential ingredient in our kitchen garden is manure. Later, we will look at what I've come to call The Art of Manurishment and the wisdom in growing really shitty food. Though any gardener can buy plastic sacks of sanitised manure at a garden store, or even acquire manure from a farmer, this incidental, though integral, end-product of raising animals is best produced on the home farm. Purchased manure may contain supplements you probably don't want in your food.

While we keep farm livestock to provide eggs, dairy, and meat, keeping animals yields so much more. To raise animals we must first raise, as issues, our fear of animals, including fear of disease and other uncleanliness. An insane regard for what we think sanitary has given cause for us to handle life with surgical gloves. We get as worried, or more, about dirt as we do about dirty images, dirty tricks, and dirty lies. Not only have we become clean crazy, we treat most any living thing, other than a very few people and maybe a pet, as dirty. Animals are considered dirty, And, yes, they might hurt us. We learn how to care for animals as we appreciate how they teach us the circle of care.

In the midst of taking stock of living, let's talk about livestock. As with the definition of a farm, the term livestock has been defined variably, usually by regulators, to determined eligibility or culpability, regarding keeping farm animals. I use the term to talk about the animal residents we raise on Croft Farm for the purposes of food and fibre, and manure. On other farms, livestock may be kept to perform work. As long as our livestock work well together to feed and make Croft

Farm fertile, I don't foresee draught animals. I am the ass that pulls most things around here, anyway, including muscles.

In many ways, many things might be said of keeping animals. My daughter Carrie, who once lived in her van with her dog when she couldn't find pet-friendly accommodations, commenting on house pets, informed me that 'we don't keep pets, they keep us'. If you eat animals and use their products you know another way they keep us. Certainly, farm animals tend to keep a farmer home tending them. As we see it now, food animals either travel great distances to our tables via supermarkets, or we farm and don't travel much at all.

An old gentleman I knew a while ago, having had a life of travel, told me he was perfectly content then to just travel to his easy chair with a copy of National Geographic. I have had the undeniable fortune to travel to, and live in, different parts of the world. Today, to maintain a smaller carbon footprint, I am fortunate to not need, or want, to take my footprints far from the ground of this farm home. But, I wouldn't recommend trying to eat a National Geographic.

Having been a college instructor, I've had the academic pulpit to ask these questions of many a classroom full of students:

- (1) How many of you eat meat?
- (2) How many of you would eat meat if you had to kill the animal yourself?

Most of the meat-eaters would not eat meat, they say, if they had to kill the animal themselves. At this point, many vegetarians and vegans sport smug smirks of being right. Others of this ilk proffer their gospel readings of endless reasons eating meat is bad.

Then I ask the meat-eaters (there is no point in further discussion with the non-meat-eaters):

- (3) Why is it all right for someone else to kill animals for your meat?

The only reason left on this bone is a need for sanitisation, and the feeble notion that someone else has to raise meat animals. A sanitised world, including industrial foods, may have welcomed more ills than these are thought to have cor-

rected. There are regular reports of food-borne pathogens originating in our otherwise sanitary food production systems. If the food production practices aren't lethal, the food itself may be. It is now coming to light that the incidence of allergies and obesity in young people, two of the biggest problems in young health, are much more prevalent in city kids than in farm kids. And, this doesn't begin to address other health threats in large-scale food production for them and most of us.

In the English language, the practice of naming the meat of the animal differently than we name the animal is itself suspect: beef from cows, pork from hogs, lamb from sheep, venison from deer, chevon from goats, and, recently, calling rabbit meat lapin. It has been noted that the animal names come to us through Old English, while the meat names are from French. But, why? There was a time that may still exist for some when some languages (and peoples) were thought better, or more refined, than others. Why even the old Russian aristocracy spoke French. And, apparently, some English speakers admired the French, or otherwise wanted to keep a channel between meat animals and the meat they ate.

Even amongst farmers who do raise animals for meat, there come admonitions to not give your food animals personal names, not even 'Porkchop' or 'Buffalo Wings'. Those who profess to not eat something with a face nosh through potato eyes, heads of lettuce and cabbage, and Germans call cloves of garlic 'toes', Argentinians call them 'teeth', and...sorry, where were we?

It seems that things given personal names are no longer easily thought of as things. While I want people to relate to me as a human being, I savour when they relate to me as Tom. I give all of our animals personal names, not only our house pets, even when, as with hens I can't tell apart, they all might be given the same name. So, flocks have been Niall and the Nualas, Mabon and the Gingers, and so on.

Even though I name our sheep, it took me nearly three years to tell our first three ewes apart. (While sheep are required to be tagged here when leaving the farm, my sheep only leave the farm once, so I don't give them tags until that day. And, these tags I carry in my hand, not in their ears, to the abattoir.) I had first used different coloured collars to distinguish our sheep, though these became of

no help when collars got dirty and wool grew over them. I then tried coloured tags, which all fell off. It helped, though, that as sheep, the girls always came into the sheep shed in the same order. Then we got our fourth ewe, Aoife, who has a noticeably darker face. You know, like we say of some races of people, sheep all look the same until you get to know them. As I looked more at the faces of our ewes, and into their eyes, I could easily tell them apart. I could also tell our ram apart by his face, though I didn't have to.

As you might have deduced, we haven't eaten these particular sheep, as yet. As a breeding flock, we have thus far used their lambs for meat. I can assure you the cute little lamb you are picturing is fully grown when eaten. The friendliest of the potential food amongst the sheep, our first ram, Cormac, loved to be petted and massaged. I tell anyone who catches me in the act of petting sheep that I am 'tenderising mutton'. I name the lambs, each and every one, and not just for record-keeping purposes, though we only live together for five or six months.

My daughter visited and shared a wonderful lamb dinner with us. I told her I knew which lamb it was, by name. I told her the name. Like many, I don't think she wanted to hear. But, she did say, "Now, not only do I know where the meal came from, I know its name." A recent meat customer, learning that the lamb he was buying had a name said, "I like that. It tells me the sheep was well cared for."

I need to confess that I rarely do the actual killing. We use our local abattoir, as I'd mentioned. But, I have and could again kill an animal for meat. Before epithets derived from 'killing is killing' are flung, I will share that I am a conscientious objector, one who, for moral reasons, refuses to kill people. I was discharged during the Vietnam War as a 'conscientious objector'. Killing for 'food' is not a moral issue for me. Killing for 'peace' or 'democracy' is, even when these are called 'safety' and 'security'. I, gratefully, have not had to kill another person for my safety or security, yet. And, I don't anticipate ever having to kill people for food.

Learning to live peaceably, and productively, with other living things on a one-acre farm is what we presently live to do, and do to live well. Just as the mental image of a farm seems to be missing something without animals, though we might picture farms without a farmer, our farm animals are part of us when we eat

them, and every day before. And, in our memories. This, as I began, is more than manure. It is more than eggs, and dairy, and meat. It is about recalling who, and what, we are.

Farm animals are the last connection we have, as animals ourselves, to other animals. Losing that, the whole cloth of life is shred. Pets help connect, but they can't replace or repair the fabric. Co-habiting with animals is connecting the earth with the home, the home with the earth. The animals most of us eat have been developed by us over millennia to be *domestic* livestock, *domestic* food. These animals are not in the wild, and seldom survive in the wild. They are part of us. Yet, in the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) that provide eggs, dairy, and meat to most of the population, livestock animals are condemned to lives we typically aren't even allowed to see. CAFOs are our way to obscure shared life. It is to hide our shame.

The life our food animals and we share on Croft Farm is very visible to all. There is no place or need to hide life on a one-acre farm. Or to hide death. The Sunday morning mink massacre of Croft Farm's initial flock of chickens was the first, but not the last of death. For now, as we are talking of livestock, I'll reserve until later further mention of dead stock. And while others and we are not likely to see any killing of our meat animals here on Croft Farm, I can assure you that animals on Croft Farm only ever have one bad day and that day is typically not on the farm.

Just how many animals, including human animals, can live well on an acre? As I always knew I would not be able to grow both all of our people food and all of our animal food, I knew I would have to bring in food for the animals. I reckoned that I'd rather shop at a feed store for them, than at a supermarket for us. The approximately \$500 dollars we spend per month on animal feed is considerably less than we were spending on the monthly food items, especially meat, that we now raise. Even with a complete fiscal accounting that told us we were spending the same amount (or possibly more than) we would have spent on supermarket food, the hidden costs of supermarket food are harder to justify than the costs we might see in providing our own food. And, selling some surplus of the food we raise always recoups some of our costs to raise food.

Even if costs were no object, we would keep all the animals we have. There are a lot of animals, by some standards. I mentioned in the first chapter, in my list of 100 limits, the notion that a home-farmer, especially one on a one-acre farm, not keep more than 100 animals, more of the smaller, less of the larger.

For comparison, I recently saw a sign for a new housing development to be built on one acre. There were to be 70 new units. Averaging, conservatively, two tenants per unit, there will be 140 people living on that acre, possibly with pets. But, living without any food but that which they import weekly.

As with the space needs I mentioned earlier of 4 square feet per large breed adult chicken, there are such reasonable calculations for every sort of farm animal. Typically these are referred to in agriculture as ‘animal units’ with reference to ‘carrying capacity’. In short, the numbers of each type of animal per area of space are computed and given. I’m not sure who uses these numbers, because it sure isn’t the CAFOs. I used the numbers to some extent in determining what could be possible on my one acre. If I’d followed the standards religiously, and had wanted a cow, the data tables told me I could have one cow per acre. Just one cow and pasture. No us, no house, no chickens, no nothing but that one cow. Fortunately, the numbers of smaller animals possible on one acre make it possible for us to live on the farm with the animals.

The idea of carrying capacity, while used variably, including talking about weight, is applied in the discussion of land not in weight or even size, or we wouldn’t have skyscrapers. No, for a farmer (or the planet, for that matter), carrying capacity refers to the capacity of the land to provide a animal with habitat, food, water, and other necessities, on a sustainable basis. “Me, too”, reminds the frog in my pocket. Yes, the broader definition, used by biologists, states carrying capacity is “the number of individuals of a particular species capable of surviving in a particular environment over long periods of time, and dependent on the effects of the limiting factors”. I trust you see this applies to more than just farm animals.

Civilisation, or literally ‘citification’, has created the illusion of unlimited carrying capacity.

In order to reduce the number of illusions we may have had about producing our own food, we first thought of carrying capacity in terms of what the acre and one old new farmer could manage. And, what we could afford to support. Just using the rule of thumb that larger individuals take up more space, we knew our house and gardens would easily demand a significant part of the acre because they already did. More than 60% of the acre, however, was habitat with the capacity for vegetables and fruits, and livestock, and all of this while maintaining symbiosis with the environment. Which livestock was determined by many limiting factors, but we did not wish to limit the range of food we might raise. Our diet includes meat, eggs, dairy, vegetables, fruits, and grain. I already knew I wasn't likely to grow grain, any more than hay, on our forest farm home.

An example: I knew we would raise chickens, and had calculated, as we two on average use a dozen eggs per week, we could get by with as few as four laying hens. But hens don't lay equally year-round. So, we might have had to buy eggs part of the year. How many chickens might we keep to be better assuring eggs for us most the year long? It turns out to be about three times that many hens. But, we figured, when that many hens are laying well, we would have too many eggs. While eggs can be preserved, selling surplus is a honourable farm practice that happens to cover the costs of raising the chickens. But, to cover costs well, we found keeping two dozen layers an even point that wasn't breaking anything. Quick math reveals that two dozen chickens only require less than 100 square feet, or one 10x10 coop. Now, we don't want to keep our chickens cooped up, so they have approximately 1000 square feet, or 1/45th of Croft Farm to carry them. In that space, we have come to presently raise approximately 50 comfortable hens and a few pleased roosters.

As a new farmer, I consulted the data regarding animal units and carrying capacities. I even read up on stocking rate, stocking density, and animal unit months. Other home farmers may benefit from the same exercise. As the habitat of the entire acre of Croft Farm was conducive to life and to living well, the formal agricultural rigour of carrying capacity was less essential than the environmental impact of a home farm ecology.

Initially, as we had to work within limits, our main reason for including sheep was their potential to yield not only meat, but also fibre and milk. The sheep breed we selected, Clun Forest, is such a triple purpose breed. Many breeds of farm livestock have been hyper-bred for single purposes – gourmet lamb but useless wool, or beautiful wool and poor meat, for example. Heritage breeds of livestock are more typically multi-purpose since, in our heritage, when we obtained our meat, fibre, and milk we didn't have much space to keep family livestock (and we were better at knowing multiple uses when we saw them). But, as sheep are known to be sheepish, we found I would never likely be able to milk them. That is why we added milk goats.

So, what do the animal units and carrying capacity tell me the number of sheep and goats should be on an acre? One acre will support five sheep and their lambs, it states. As sheep commonly have twins, or more, there could be fifteen sheep supported on an acre. I keep one ram and four ewes. I have had, then, for half of the year a total of thirteen sheep in our paddock. The paddock, of course, is not the entire acre. It may be about 15,000 square feet, or so. Our five adult sheep, then, could have three thousand square feet each. You know, of course, however, that sheep are flocked up. This behaviour allows the potential for rotational grazing once the forest floor transforms to pasture as the sheep themselves seed the paddock with hay.

How can we also keep goats? The tables tell us that the entire acre can only carry the sheep. And, that an acre can carry a maximum, otherwise, of five goats and their kids. Remember, though, we are bringing a lot of animal feed in and we support other Island farmers to feed our own farm. But, goats are herd animals. We could have, possibly, a milk goat who lived with sheep, but we all do best when we do well with our own kind. So, we welcomed Faery and Gypsy, a mother and daughter, to be our goat 'herd' and I became a goatherd. And, we gave the goats their own part of the acre.

I think I mentioned that we had considered raising pigs for meat, as well, but opted to build a self-catering guest cottage instead. While hogs need very little space, the little space we had was still enough to give Faery and Gypsy, and their kids, a shed and paddock of about 2500 square feet. As with the sheep, the kids

are there for half the year at most. We did decide to keep one of Faery's doe kids one year, Tulip, as Faery is getting older and I'm not sure how long we'll keep her. Though Faery has had triplets twice since we've known her and has been a good milker, most of the time – volume is fine, cooperation does not always flow as well, cf., 'stubborn as a...'. So far, keeping three goats has shown no adverse effects, other than Faery now had two daughters to fight with. When it came time for breeding, Tulip didn't breed, so we were back to the two older does. More recently we have kept a buck kid, Hatter. Having a male to deal with has introduced new horns of a dilemma into mother/daughter issues.

As poultry can comfortably take up very little space, we are able to increase our egg and meat diversity. To each small flock of turkeys and ducks, typically six to eight of each, we have allotted respective coops and yards. I mentioned earlier, too, the ducks had daily time waddling free in the kitchen garden. Though their yard is later restricted for most of the growing season, they still enjoy free access to the blueberry patch and part of the orchard. The fruit plants love them for it.

Last spring, after lambing and kidding, and after bringing new chicks, and poults, and ducklings on the farm, I completed a census. Counting our house pets and us in the total number of animals on Croft Farm, the tally was one hundred. The only time, however, I felt anything like crowded was at feeding time when groups of creatures crowded at my feet. Otherwise, Croft Farm has become a well-appointed living room.

As to carrying capacity, the amount of life that can be supported, time will ultimately tell. The amount of wildlife, which considers Croft Farm part of its home, is already telling. While some of the life we first saw when we arrived is not as visible, such as we don't see as many rabbits, that is likely due to having a cat and two terriers on the prowl. Cute as rabbits are, I prefer not to see them in the kitchen garden area they'd most frequented. I still see plenty of rabbits in the neighbourhood. Other rodents, however, have come, like the mink, and too many rats and mice. Now, while I can now tell various breeds of sheep, goats, chickens, turkeys, and ducks apart, I cannot tell you for certain if I had been seeing a lot of rats and mice, or just various-sized rats. Rodent sizes aside, Croft Farm attracted a lot of them in a relatively short time.

Farm animals are not particularly fastidious eaters. Grain, in particular, is often spilled. And, open feeders and feed storage containers, however secured, are all waiting buffets for these grain-loving vermin. Though fear of disease is not without due attention, the extra costs in feed and the destruction and mess that rodents wreak can become the epidemic. It came to that on Croft Farm.

In addition to seeing these ratty vermin ever scurrying everywhere around our animal housing, hearing them in the walls, seeing them twitching and staring at me in the goat shed, consuming their weight in plastic and wood to get where they were going, and parading like Balinese shadow puppets in the dark, they soon began to move into our house. And, in the kitchen garden they had in very short order one spring eaten their way through a bed of yellow beets, while smugly ignoring the bed of purple beets one bed over. They devoured any chance of a tomato or pepper, eating the leaves and tender ends of vines, temporarily leaving hoped-for fruit, then gnawing to smithereens the plumper green fruit. They did the same to other vegetable starts, and nearly destroyed grapevines that had just started to bear. And their gnawing at the young blueberry shrubs nearly terminated these.

I know, I said that I would principally only kill for food. Animals eating my farm fits under that rubric. Until I was unable to purchase effective rodent poison, because I did not meet farm status per government definitions, I was killing when the population of rats seemed to be getting excessive. Now I'm not sure, given how rodents multiply and seeing what havoc even a few wreak, what a desirable number of rats or mice might be. I hired a professional exterminator. While rat poison is potentially toxic to other creatures, I am assured that the methods of dispensing with these rodents are not likely at all to affect other creatures, as there is no secondary kill from the poison. Other creatures would have to eat the poison directly, or consume an awful lot of poisoned rats in a short period. Granted, there may not be as many owls or ravens to come to feed on rats, as there are far fewer rats to feed on. I still hear their hoots and caws, and see them in the trees, so there is enough to keep the animal units, carrying capacity, stocking rates, and stocking densities for wildlife plentiful on Croft Farm.

What has come to Croft Farm is other less harmful, more helpful feeders to eat any spilled grain, any parasitic bugs, and weed seed. Birds of a feather flock in the

succession of seasons. Orange flashes of varied thrush, tiny grey-green bushtits, chickadees in black-and-white and sparrows of every stripe, yellow warblers and dark-eyed juncos, all come to feed. And they tell us, in nattering alarum, when owl and raven make their rounds.



# The Life Anew

The first farm animal born on Croft Farm was stillborn. While the mink attack on our first flock of chickens brought the initial farm animal deaths, we also experienced the deaths of both our dog and cat who had moved to the farm with us. Aja and Suki were old at the time we started the farm, but they enjoyed happy retirement days just as I was beginning to do the same. Both pets died in our arms.

Aja, the first dog Leslie Anne and I shared, is buried in the front corner of the kitchen garden where he often would go to greet passersby or sniff the world as he might, since he was blind before his twelve years ended. A woodland garden we planted over Aja's grave abounds with life, just as Aja did. Suki, a cat that had been with Leslie Anne even before we met, though not formerly an outdoor cat, also roamed the farm and was particularly fond of 'going wild' in the forested area that became the sheep paddock. She is buried there. I often visit the spot when I'm tending the sheep.

I don't believe that any of us are really ever comfortable with death, as comfort is an objective and experience of living beings. I'm just glad I will be laid to rest, so I don't have to stand for anything else when I'm dead. Then again, I won't have to rest for anything either, even farming. Of course, I wouldn't be growing my own food while in old age unless I wanted to forestall death, or at least eat well in my remaining time. Growing one's food stands for something. I grow food because I'm uncomfortable with life as we've made it. To make a life in old age, I could only think of farming. And, I couldn't think of farming - growing food - without raising animals.

The first sheep were three ewes named Bidly, Alice, and Florence, named not after favourite maiden aunts but for three famous Irish witches (magic is afoot on Croft Farm). When we acquired our sheep from a farmer who raised the Clun Forest breed, Grant Smith, also a retiree, one who'd left the RCMP to start a farm and charcuterie, the lambs were old enough to have lambs of their own and had spent their first summer, into the fall, with a ram on Grant's farm. When the time came in late winter for our new sheep to lamb, only one of the ewes, Florence, gave birth. We suspect her baby was stillborn, though Florence stood by her in that morning of cold February rain. Her lamb may have lived briefly, though deprived of the needed colostrum. Nursing may have been not quickly achieved for a new lamb and a new mum. This lamb is the only animal born on Croft Farm that never got a name. I do remember where we buried her.

Since I've talked of animal burials more than once, you have probably gathered that we have, thus far, buried animals who die on Croft Farm on Croft Farm. We have done this with all, except for the hen victims of the mink massacre.

While I still fear divulging the location where I left eleven Dorking hen carcasses, I will say I gave it ecological thought. I remember pacing that day for what seemed hours to figure out what I was going to do with this much death. Although profoundly ashamed of any indecorous treatment of these feathered companions, I put them in garbage bags. And I put the bags in the back of my truck. I drove around for more seeming hours to find their resting place. I laid them in sight of the sky. I disposed of the emptied plastic bags in recycling.

The hens were recycled, as well, as food for others. The rooster, Samhain, had died in my arms, by my hand, since he was so mortally wounded from defending his hens. I honoured him with burial in the kitchen garden.

There had been periodic, but few, deaths of livestock since, mostly of poultry. We have tried to foster weak chicks, nurse an unclaimed lamb, and aid Gypsy the goat in kidding, but new lives were lost. Yet little is lost on us, when we get to both experience these deaths and welcome the annual beginnings of so many new lives.

After Florence lost her lamb, it turned out that Bidly and Alice hadn't become pregnant in their first year as we'd hoped, and had been possible. Though we

hadn't intended to keep a ram of our own, Grant offered to sell us one at a good price to make up for the pregnant ewes he'd thought he'd sold us earlier. So, we brought Cormac home.

I'd already described, thankfully, how this animal, who weighed more than me and had a harder head than mine, was friendly. When Grant had delivered the first ewes, he merely opened his trailer doors and the sheep ran from us, into a far corner of the paddock. I never touched them. I held Cormac when I brought him home. We've now made a practice of holding every animal that is born on or comes to Croft Farm. As further evidence of the value of touch, with sheepish sheep, when we decided to add another ewe, and brought Aoife home in my arms, she became the first of our ewes who was not wary of us.

My preceding discussion of typically having all multiple births from the ewes attests to the life comfort the sheep feel, and to the ram's comfort and prowess. Bidy gave birth to triplets last year, though one, Agnes, was unclaimed in the February night. We brought Agnes into the house when I found her alone in the morning, but it was soon too late.

We have never had to assist the ewes with lambing. We chose the Clun Forest breed for this reason in particular. Their narrow heads, in addition to giving them a sleek appearance, are the key reason for easier birthing. I have, nonetheless, witnessed most of the lambs' births. They have tended to occur in the morning rather than in the middle of the night. My part in the lambing process has been to stand at the fence, drop-jawed in awe.

Leslie Anne and I, within a day or two at most of lamb births, go and hold and attend to each of the newborn. Waiting past the second day would mean we would likely be unable to catch the lamb. If I haven't named the lamb as yet from what words came to me standing at the fence, I ask the lamb. We dab iodine on the little umbilicus, and dock the long tails. Except for Anwen, the black sheep, who came with a long tail traditional for mountain breeds, all lambs born on the farm have their tails docked. Docking is less common in other parts of the world. In some countries, the lamb's tail, fattened, is a dining delicacy. We dock our

lambs due to our often wet, and muddy, environment. We use tight elastic rings. The tails fall off in a couple weeks.

As with the sheep, our goats, Toggenburgs, selected for their prolific and sweeter milk, generally kid unaided. In Gypsy's case last year, I tried to help when her labour seemed to be drawing out too long. The fully developed doe kid, Apple, was stillborn. Later that day, Gypsy expelled two small fetuses. Faery went on, a week later, to have triplets, too. All of Faery's kids were quite lively from the start. We believe that Faery may have butted Gypsy fairly early after Gypsy was bred causing the abortions, and later stillbirth.

We have debated whether to keep our own goat buck for breeding. If you have ever smelled an adult goat buck in breeding season, you will understand the reason. Bucks like to pee on their faces to apply manly goat cologne. Up to now, when it came time each fall, the does have been chauffeured in the back of the pickup truck for their only conjugal visit to the buck's farm. I have wondered whether Faery's aggression toward Gypsy is partially her acting like the buck she doesn't have. Maybe a buck would change the dynamics, we thought (it does). It would eliminate the need and cost of off-farm breeding (yes, by not keeping our own buck, I have had to pay for sex.). We wondered whether it would be harder to confine and potentially destructive (it's not). Now that we have Hatter, and know buck cologne is temporary, we look forward to breeding our own goats as we have our sheep. I like the idea of on-farm breeding, and families of animals.

We have been more successful in selling surplus doe goats than selling lambs, as live lambs. As people eat some lamb meat but little goat meat in our part of the world, and are more likely to want a milk goat than a pet lamb, you can see the economy at work. We have had no trouble at all selling our surplus lamb as meat, the demand far greater than the supply. But, we won't and can't raise more lambs. Fortunately, most of our goat kids have been does. We have used goat kids for meat, which our dogs, Pooka and Caleigh, and I like. Leslie Anne doesn't care for chevon, or that much for goat milk. Until a fairly recent health concern, Leslie loved cheese however, particularly goat cheese. She had wondered aloud if we could raise a milk cow and calf instead, but our tiny farm precludes that pretty much, unless we don't raise the sheep. Which we still want to do.

Even though we don't use the goat milk as much as we might, it has afforded us the opportunity to buy a lot fewer dairy products. It has taught me to make soft and hard cheeses, yogurt, and ice cream. We make our own goat milk soap. The whey from the cheese making has also provided another source of food and fertilizer. And, as I'd indicated earlier, goat milk has proven an excellent pet and chicken food.

When growing animals for food, it takes a while to get a good sense of how much the animals will produce. Some, like sheep, since ours are raised for meat and fibre, force us to figure out both how much meat we need and what to do with the wool. Sheep grow wool; they don't make sweaters. So, my home office is also a wool warehouse. Neither Leslie Anne nor I are spinners yet, but have experimented with felting. I have some experience at weaving, and Leslie is a knitter, but both crafts use yarn. Now, we could have the wool spun into yarn. We do take the fleeces to a small local woolen mill to have the wool cleaned and processed into batts or rovings. The batts are ready as is to become great pillows or bed comforters. The rovings are ready for spinning. We did once try to wash a fleece ourselves. This is an arduous, lengthy day's work. Then, the washed wool needs to be carded, which, however romantic it might sound, was not something I yearned to do by hand.

I have begun to use some raw wool as insulation, if and where needed, in the walls of some of the farm's outbuildings. Yes, before there was rock wool or mineral wool for insulation, real wool was used. In addition to thermal and acoustic insulating qualities, wool is fire-resistant. The surface structure of wool is water-resistant, but wool absorbs water vapour; doing so, it actually releases heat. Very few other materials that might be used for insulation, or in other areas of building construction (e.g., in making bricks), are as environmentally friendly as wool in both production and biodegradability. Incidentally, in the return to using wool as insulation material, it is waste wool (imperfect for other fibre uses) that is used for this purpose.

And, even if we are not using much of the wool ourselves, handspinners and fibre artists have expressed interest and purchased raw and processed wool from us. It is our desire to either ourselves use what we produce, such as the wool, or find

outlets for as much of what grows here on Croft Farm as we might. As it is, since we use an abattoir to process all of our livestock for meat, useable materials like feathers, hides, and sheepskins are considered waste by the abattoirs and thus, go into landfills. I have made a practice of retrieving and processing our sheepskins myself. If you can't think of uses for sheepskins, old people have some soft ideas.

Farming has not only made clear what goes into the food we eat, it has certainly made eminently memorable where our food comes from. When we used to run out of food, we just went back to the supermarket. While, as I've emphasized, we still do buy groceries, growing food, especially food animals, has made me consider not only where my food comes from but also where the animals come from, how to provide the best lives possible, that they are much more than cuts of meat in plastic-wrapped Styrofoam trays, and that they give us much more than food.

Our lambs, at approximately five to six months, each provide forty to fifty lbs. of meat. If, for example, we eat two pounds of lamb per week, two lambs are enough for us for a year. Any more lambs than this is surplus. We are able to provide lamb to others, and their purchases pay for feed for the animals. And the income helps to buy other meats, like the pork we don't raise. We have traded some lamb for salmon.

Our poultry also provides meat, after providing eggs in the case of hens. Not all poultry meat is created equal. Yet, heritage chickens typically not only are good layers but yield a good carcass, even after two years-old. After three-years old, most any chicken, to me, is never as delectable as younger birds. That does not mean, necessarily, that older birds need to be relegated to the soup pot, though soup pot chicken is ever as palatable. It took a while for us to first enjoy our own chicken cooked any way. Now we always seem to have chickens in the freezer, and are often giving some away.

You already know we did not eat our first flock of chickens, the Dorkings, Samhain and his ladies, the Saoirsés, as we did not trust the mink butcher. Within a week or two of their sacrifice, we were looking for a replacement flock. I'd learned that a neighbor woman, Christine, who primarily raised turkeys, also had a flock of Welsumer chickens, another dual-purpose breed, particularly known for dark

terra cotta eggs, and it is a Welsumer rooster who is the logo bird on Kellogg's cereals. When we first contacted the turkey lady through email, we got no response. Having her telephone number, I gave her a call. It turned out that she was in the process of selling her farm. We just wanted a new small flock of chickens, not a poultry farm.

She was willing to sell us her Welsumer flock, telling us they were a year to two old. While we were standing there completing the deal, a huge tom turkey sidled up to Leslie Anne. Rather than being startled, Leslie asked Christine, "Are you selling him, too?" Henry was a full-grown Bourbon Red tom, as much a giant as a gentleman. I was surprised Leslie had wanted anything but chickens, though I may have talked of eventually acquiring other poultry. But, there we were and there he was and there you are. As the turkey lady had to clear her poultry by the end of the month, I went home and set to build our turkey house and pen. Upon completion of what I dubbed the Church of the Wholly Turkey, Henry and the three Graces moved in at Croft Farm.

The Welsumers, Mabon and the Gingers, came about the same time and, after a week or so of adjustment, were laying their lovely dark brown eggs. I quickly noticed, however, that some of the hens looked a might too thin. Then one died. I plucked her and, in her nakedness, she looked like a not-so-pretty, pretty old dame. Some of her surviving sisters didn't look much better. By the time shortly after when Mabon the rooster gave himself a nasty gash in the leg with his own spur, I knew it was time to harvest what meat we might from this particular flock. The meat was meager, and tough, and I began to wonder what we would later do with spent hens, or what we would do for chicken meat at all. I also suspected the Welsumer flock was older than we were told.

Urban chickens, all hens (no boys allowed) and typically a maximum of four, are kept to lay eggs. I know that some urban chicken tenders keep their hens for the birds' entire lifetimes, up to possibly ten years or more, even after they may stop laying altogether. Most cities do not permit home slaughtering of animals for meat, though I suspect it happens regularly. I also guess that some urban chickens do go to abattoirs. I have heard of at least one case, in Portland, Oregon I believe, where someone opened a Home for Retired Chickens.

As we believe eating an animal becomes us, not only do we endeavor to ensure our farm animals live well and die well, assuring we eat well means harvesting as many of the animals we raise as we might. This is where the utilitarian and aesthetic beauties of heritage stock are the choice for our home farm. Other home farmers may be tempted to keep poultry bred to be prolific egg layers and, in addition, also keep other poultry bred to be large, fast-growing meat birds . If you have the luxury of time, energy, and space, this is a way to ensure a larder of both eggs and meat. Older home farmers are small-time, of precious energy, and best if finding ways to make small stuff big enough. The single acre yields best when multiple purposes are considered in every animal and plant, in every place and time.

When the Welsumers were due to make their trip to our freezer, I had already decided that I would start our next flock from chicks. I was able to find a farm over on the Mainland here in British Columbia that was breeding Light Sussex chickens, an ancient British breed (possibly of Roman origin), an excellent layer and an excellent meat bird. Typically, the minimum number of chicks such hatcheries will ship is twenty-five. So, we had twenty-five chicks flown to us ...a relatively small carbon scratch-print, I allowed. One need not know anything at all about chicken genetics and agricultural economics to know that half of the chicks in a hatch will be boys, and half will be girls, more or less - in number, not gender assignment. The girls become pullets who will become hens. The boys become cockerels who become food. We typically keep one rooster per dozen hens.

Part of furthering life on a home farm is in selecting good stock, and a rooster is such a choice. I admit that I am swayed by appearances that may be only feather-deep. A handsome rooster is the master of ceremonies for each farm day. Conformation and comportment, as well as appearance, I am learning, are essential to these barnyard dignitaries, who more importantly determine qualities in the eggs produced, particularly if some of these are to hatch into future chickens.

A recent example in rooster selection was Beltaine and Colm. If you want to remember their names, think “belting” and “calm”, though I didn’t register the homophony at the time. These two roosters came early a past summer in a hatch of mixed breeds. A fellow up the way from our farm who breeds chickens, Gavin, offered a good deal of \$50 for an entire hatch. There were a total of 38 chicks,

though three did not survive. Of the variety of breeds in the hatch – there were Red Rocks, Light Sussex, Silver Laced-Wyandottes, Buff Orpingtons, and Ameraucanas, I had been looking for Buff Orpingtons or Wyandottes, as both are among the best of the dual-purpose breeds.

I knew then that I would be keeping either a Buff Orpington or a Silver-Laced Wyandotte cockerel. Which depended on how many pullets of either of those breeds were in this hatch. There were six Buff Orpington girls. The Buff Orpington cockerel would get to stay. Even though there were only three Wyandotte pullets, it looked like that cockerel also had a job on Croft Farm. But, I was determined to withhold selection until the cockerels grew a bit more. After all, as a mixed flock, I had a choice if I wished to select breeding stock from any of the breeds.

We had been curious about having some Ameraucana hens, to have their blue-green eggs. There turned out to be only one of these hens in the hatch, but one was okay to give the spot of colour to this mixed flock's predictable egg array of shades of brown. There was an Ameraucana cockerel I should have guessed was just as likely to be in this mixed hatch. Beltaine, the Ameraucana cockerel, named for the apex of springtime, was blossoming into quite a dandy. He was a Wheaten variety of the breed. The Ameraucana, not particularly considered a heritage bird, was bred in the USA in the 1970s as a cross with the Araucana, a Chilean chicken, for the expressed purpose of getting blue eggs. Knowing that this rooster could pass on the gene for blue eggs, I decided to keep him. The Wyandotte cockerel, hence, had a black day in the cause of blue eggs.

With previous flocks we had raised from chicks, we had selected the rooster for the flock on looks, to some extent – bigger torso, or nicer comb, for example – but the main criterion was the timbre of his cock-a-doodle-do. And, we had never regretted any of those selections. We should have auditioned Beltaine; he would *not* have stayed on. Not only did his crow have the musical quality of a bowed rusty saw, his crowing switch was stuck at 'on'. His bride, the bearded woman, whose eggs, however lovely blue, turned out to be smaller and more delicate, was to join Beltaine later that Spring to honeymoon on some other, distant farm.

Oddly, Colm, the Buff Orpington rooster, was more than calm, we had never once heard him crow. At the time, we hadn't determined if that was good or bad. He was to be the only rooster with the eighteen Birds in the larger coop, although a few of these hens were Light Sussex, so they could have moved in with Niall and the Nualas on the other side of the farmyard.

About the time Beltaine and the bearded woman would get their honeymoon tickets, there would be new chicks arriving. Only Niall was to crow out over Croft Farm for the time being. And the life we know would begin anew. Lambs and kids are born. New ducklings and turkey poults are welcomed.

To talk of renewing life, I have already talked about Cormac as stay-at-home father with the sheep, and Faery's and Gypsy's goat trysts with mostly Maximus at Snapdragon Dairy Farm. I mentioned, too, Gavin, the poultry breeder neighbour and the chicks airlifted to the Island, the turkey lady, and so on. But, I haven't talked about incubating eggs for our own hatches.

Some farms, I know, have broody hens that go off to nest and return with new chicks for the farm without any farmer needed. We have not, as yet, had any poultry hatch under hens. Well, to be honest, we have had hens go broody and dutifully sit on the eggs. I've even noticed the hens taking turns. What has resulted is a hatch of rotten egg stench at about four weeks, or so.

I have tried to hatch eggs under heat. We purchased a Hovabator, a Styrofoam formed incubator with an egg turner and which holds up to 48 eggs. I have never tried to hatch that many; the most has been 24, due to the days it may take to gather enough eggs before possibly losing fertility. I understand now, as long as eggs are kept neither too cool nor too warm, they remain viable for a couple weeks.

The incubator works quite well at keeping the eggs at the temperature and moisture level needed for the 21 days to hatch chickens, or 28 days for turkeys or ducks (more moisture is needed for ducks). The at-home incubator is subject to failures, of course, through a power failure, for example. The greater variable is farmer competence.

My first attempt at home incubation was set up out on our sun porch. The location might readily alert you to a probable problem. Yes, despite the otherwise effective thermostat on the incubator, a location that goes through broad temperature shifts day and night and day again defeats the temperature control the incubating eggs need. I have had success with subsequent hatches, up to 16 chicks at a time. And, I have hatched a few turkey poults. My one attempt with duck eggs was a complete loss. I will continue to incubate eggs and will continue to replace and renew our flocks. And, we will continue, I suspect, to also restock with purchased new poultry.

The other livestock we introduced later was bees. As there had been a significant die-off of Vancouver Island honeybees a few years prior to our moving here, I was concerned from the start for adequate pollination of the vegetables and fruits we were planting. Fortunately, there were many feral bees and some honeybees that came to our gardens. Having our own hives would, of course, better assure pollination. And, we liked the idea of gathering our own honey and beeswax.

Although Leslie Anne has a robust fear of bees, she bought me my first hives as anniversary gifts. The best gifts come from such love. Unfortunately, though the love continues, the first colonies of bees did not. Our cool, wet winter was too much for the small clusters. I'm planning on building a bee house to assure better conditions. And, we will begin bee nucs anew.

This farm of many creatures will mean that life will continue to live and die here. I hope to be one of these lives. I think of my ashes feeding this acre that feeds us now, nourishing it as I have tried to do living with it. In time, the life we know will be memories someone may hold. We do not know who will eventually hold possession of our acre. We hope it possesses and holds new farmers like us. And livestock.



# Getting the Routine Rite

I used to get up at five a.m. I sometimes had to, when a commute to work was an hour or more daily. Other times in my public career I would get up early just to eat breakfast and read the newspaper, when people did such things in the morning. For me, it was a statement: ‘This day belongs to me, not to my job.’ Most of the day belonged to my job, with or without making a statement. In most work lives, we spend more waking hours with people we don’t really choose to be with than with the loved ones we’ve chosen to be with. And we spend more time away from the place we call home.

Home farming can certainly change that. At least I get to live with the animals I choose to work with. While Leslie Anne completes her career, I cherish the weekends and holidays when she and I are home together. Since I dearly enjoy Leslie’s company and long for more, I harbour the wish for the day when she too will retire. Home farming is a life best shared. We certainly have plans. Leslie is as committed to our home farm as I. Her active commitment is visible in already up-and-coming flower gardens, our gaily-painted animal houses, our home living comforts, and currently in outfitting our workshop. And all that on her weekends and holidays.

As our farm chores are presently solely in the domain of this husbandman, I feel it essential that I describe how one old new farmer grows food and grows older, as a daily routine.

While we like to hear that we don’t look as old as we are, or gain aplomb for what we are able to do ‘at our age’, I can assure you that I do feel my age. And I feel it more in the evening than in the morning. That is a good thing. If I felt too

old in the morning, I'd worry whether I would see evening. So, slow and steady may win the race, but slow and easy keeps one in the race; no cause to race at getting older once you're already there.

To talk about my home farming routine, I wish I didn't have to call it a routine. Routine has the unfortunate patina of negative connotations. Why it even rhymes with poutine, which Canadian readers will equate with something you don't want to do too often! We don't have a positive standalone word in English for repetitive behaviours involving work. Repetitive...continuous, monotonous, habitual? Yes, we can talk of good work habits. But these are inherently to lessen the travails of repetitious actions. There are, of course, repetitive behaviours that give satisfaction. Some give satisfaction so regularly they cause pain to others and oneself; we call these addictions. An avid fan is a fanatic. A workaholic will need detox. I'm trying to think of a word to convey a repetitious routine habit that has some positive denotation and connotations.

All I can think of is 'living'.

Living a farm home life means working your living, not really working for a living, and certainly not necessarily to earn a living. You've already earned a living if you've reached old age. If routine is the ordinary, living should be extraordinary. Growing one's own food may not be as ordinary as it once was but, for those who grow their own food, this routine can be quite extraordinary.

I do not get out of bed when I hear a cock crowing. I've probably heard some roosters we've kept announce away the night all night. Now I close the window. My farm day begins with a purr and a poke. I am awakened each morning by Dooley, our cat, pawing at my beard, increasingly insistent, then using his head to push back the covers. Dooley the cat's pineal gland in his hard head knows when the sun rises. Gratefully, the tall trees about Croft Farm set the striking of the cat's paw about an hour after dawn. I've begun to wake up more lately at the same time Dooley does. Maybe my pineal gland is working as it should. The electric light has all but made this little endocrine gland effete for urban dwellers.

I still enjoy my morning cup of coffee. But first, I feed Dooley, let the dogs out to pee, and refill the dog bowls with food and water. I sit to read through the news

headlines and, more essentially, the weather forecasts. I find that the news has less and less to do with me, while the weather more and more. This time with my coffee is also the time, the only time for the most part, when I read. While I have enjoyed fiction, and even written short stories and novels, I find I am drawn more to indulgence in narratives more actual than virtual. I reserve my evenings for the fictional worlds of movies and television, when I am too tired to learn something.

Glancing up from my morning reading, I check the time on the wind-up wall clock above the mantle, if it hasn't stopped. I could just look at the computer tablet or laptop for a time check, as I often read digital books now, but some old habits feel better. I have thought how our wall clock, over a century old now, was once the timekeeper for an automobile factory. Not that our home is a factory, even though it is where we make our living. Most of all I think on how I have to wind this clock to keep time. Undemanding though my time is now, it is clock time that generally cues me to my home farm day.

When it is nigh unto 8:30am, I head upstairs for my ablutions and dressing for the day. Though morning showering has always been a pleasure, it is a gift to dress myself for the farm now, after years of dressing for public presentation. Oftentimes, I might wear the same jeans I wore yesterday if they are not yet too dirty. I'm a bit choosier with clothing items closer to my nose, and to my skin. The dogs, Pooka the Whoodle from Coombs, and Caleigh O'Mara, the Irish soft-coated wheaten terrier, wait in anticipation on the bed they've returned to. When I've dressed I announce to my canine farmpaws, "It is time to wake up the animals".

Naturally, all of the farm animals are already awake. It is really I who awakens. As Pooka and Caleigh regale one another into the new day, I set to opening the coops. I closed them the night before after the birds had gone to roost, not particularly to close the poultry in but to keep predators out. In the summer, the turkeys seem to prefer to sleep outside. They are big birds, so I fear less for their safety. Though, I have lost full-grown turkeys to blood-thirsty mink. As I pass by the turkey yard, I offer a hearty good morning to Albee and the Aileens, Diarmid and the Grainnes, or whomever the current tenants are. Greeting the sheep similarly, but addressing them each by name, I bring them a bucket of grain mixed with alfalfa, about a cup or so per animal.

As the sheep shed is in the middle of the farm, I continue on to open the last chicken coop and to the duck coop. The ducks are quiet at my approach and activities, until I also offer morning greetings and call them by name. Declan and the Maeves, or Magnus and the Maggies, are not only let out into their yard, but also for a morning dip in their freshly-filled kiddie pool. Then, unless vegetables are newly planted, I leave their yard gate open so that they may go to work in the kitchen garden.

I return to the feed bin near the turkey house where I keep poultry scratch. I toss a few handfuls of scratch into the turkeys (though they have at times picked out the cracked corn and left other grains to sprout), and I fill a small tub with scratch for the chickens. As I walk back around to the chicken yards, strewing the scratch in each, I check inside the coops to collect the morning's eggs, and certainly that all the birds are well, and to assure the flock has food pellets and fresh water. I stop to fill these as needed. I have gotten pretty good at not breaking pocketfuls of eggs. I don't give scratch to the ducks, as they are quite able to find the bugs and greens they prefer (and grains can cause them bloat).

The goats get special attention, as I milk them twice a day for much of the year. Their morning feeding of two cups grain is done in the milking stanchion. They generally consider this a fair exchange. Faery sometimes forgets the equation, and tries to kick over the milk bucket, or worse, to step into it. Any such movements will result, she knows but continues to learn, in removal of her food. I have never deprived her of food, mind you, as she has plenty of hay to eat at all times. But, you would also comply with the milking & feeding accord rather than just eat grass. The grain is as much a treat as it is a supplement.

Even when the goats are not being milked, I feed their grain in the stanchion. Even kids, does or bucks, are trained to the stanchion. This allows time for general grooming and checking their health more closely. As it is difficult during milking season to trim hooves, for example, this is one thing done at goat feeding time.

The farm animal morning chores above take all of thirty minutes, even with time taken to survey animal antics, the dogs running circles, chickens scratching

and scrapping, the sheep coming orderly to the trough, to watch an eagle overhead, to gawp at the beauty abounding.

I think it took longer to write about the morning farm chores than it takes to do them. That is one of the beauties of routine living on a home farm, when the routine becomes a sacred ritual, a rite beyond words.

Depending on when I begin the morning chores, I am typically finished by 9:00 or 9:30am. From then, until mid-afternoon, I may have no other chores to do with the animals. I may have work related to their care and maintenance, such as housing needs or feed supply runs into town, but most days this time between morning and afternoon farm animal chores is mine. I happily do spend much of the time certainly at home with the farm and its needs, but time for many other interests is afforded for my mornings and afternoons. No longer busied by meetings and reports on meetings, I am meeting deeper needs. This is often a time that I write, or draw, or do research.

It is, of course, too, a time to keep house. Dishes to be washed and clothes to be laundered and floors to be swept are examples of keeping house. Keeping a farmhouse also includes such regular routines as washing eggs, baking bread, making cheese, and brewing beer, and in putting food by, as our home farm is intended. But, one does not live (well) by these alone. The kitchen is only as important as the kitchen garden is essential.

Mornings and early afternoons, particularly before the mounting heat of summer, are the best times to attend to the garden that makes our kitchen. Unlike vegetable gardens I have worked when I still had to earn a living, the tilling, fertilizing, planting, and weeding do not all have to be done on the same weekend. Done a little each day is more in keeping with living as a home farmer. This is good news for my old new farmer's body. One day I might till some of the raised beds with the broad fork, working in the manure or wood ash I hauled there on a prior day. I might pick radishes while I weed the carrots. As there are few weeds due to the intensive methods I use, most weeds are controlled on evening walks amongst the beds, perhaps after I've walked around with the garden hose watering. But mornings are typically enough time to care for the garden.

While the spring through autumn are busier times in the gardens, I often have weeded, hauled manure, or even harvested on winter days. Nonetheless, there is much time available between morning farm chores and afternoon farm chores, especially in winter, when I live the life of a gentleman farmer. There is plenty of time for great culture in small-scale agriculture. I believe it was Cicero who intoned that farming and study were the ideal pursuits in old age. I know it was Cicero who said, “If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.” I would add only that reading is similar to gardening if you do it well, and gardening is similar to reading if you take time to reflect on what you are doing.

The afternoon feeding for our livestock occurs right at 2:30pm, on the dot...or around 3pm, though sometimes a bit later. Usually, the sheep let me know. And, in the sheep’s repeating bleating, the goats are on the fence, the chickens begin to give a cluck, the turkeys turn to gobble, and the ducks don’t know what to think – they’ve never had an afternoon feeding. The routine begins when I begin to cut up apples – slices for the goats and cubes for the sheep. This is a treat I give to the goats and sheep every afternoon. Cutting the apples is also, for Pooka and Cal-eigh, dog shorthand for “It’s time to feed the animals”, which I also say aloud in people words. The three of us make our second round of the day.

I mix the cubed apples with the sheep’s second feeding of grain and alfalfa. While this is only another cup, or so, of feed apiece, Grant, the farmer I got the sheep from, says I spoil them. They don’t taste spoiled. The goats are spoiled, so maybe that’s what Leslie Anne tastes. I hand feed the goats sliced apples, one at a time, to each in turn. Having studied as a young boy for the Roman Catholic priesthood, this is the closest I’ve gotten to distribute the eucharist of holy communion. As it pertains, the etymology of eucharist is ‘thanksgiving, gratitude’. You have to feed a goat by hand to know what I mean.

The poultry, except for the ducks, are given another scattering of scratch per flock. The ducks may be put back in their yard at this time if they’ve taken to trimming the vegetables, after bored with bug hunting. I again check as I go around to each coop whether food or water, or bedding, needs to be refreshed and refresh as needed. I also look for afternoon eggs to collect.

These afternoon farm chores are complete within twenty minutes, a half hour if I dawdle, which I love to do. And that's okay. I rarely start new projects in the afternoons. It is not unusual, despite my many happy hours of home farming as I grow old, that afternoon farm chores are followed by my official Happy Hour. This hasn't yet lead, but could, to a real farmer's afternoon. A 'farmer's afternoon', in euphemistic parlance of a bygone day, is a 'nap'. I've never been one to take naps but that hasn't stopped me from daydreaming in the afternoon. Sometimes I even do this while completing a home farm chore for the day, like bread baking, or cheese making. Or making dinner.

I like to cook for Leslie Anne and me, especially using as much of our home-grown fare as possible. It makes it even more special to come home to a farm home. I need to also tell you that I don't just cook for the two of us; I do it for myself. To bring forth a meal that is primarily from animals and plants I've grown on this acre is self-centered in its best senses.

I also don't just cook for the two of us; I cook for our dogs. Pooka and Caleigh get a farm meal every evening. Often it is cooked, though sometimes raw, like bones and other livestock offal, which is clearly not awful to the dogs. Often the dogs' dinner may be leftovers from our own meals. Pooka and Caleigh, during the day, also may enjoy, in addition to fresh goat's milk in the morning, a broken or shell-less fresh egg once in a while. If you didn't know, chickens sometimes lay eggs without a shell, held together instead by a thin membrane, like an egg balloon. Pooka likes to catch these tenderly in his teeth.

Friends from the city had wondered if our farm life would mean loss of such things as garbage collection, recycling, and cable service. I can assure you that we have all of these. And, I can report that our otherwise 19th century lifestyle still keeps our fingers on the keyboards, screens, remote controls, and pulse of 21st century life. I am quite fond of streaming video, and Internet research, thank you very much. What I don't do, because I don't get it, is text message and post day-to-day thoughts and occurrences on social media. Indulging in tube time may be fattening but it is also nourishing, if your mental life works off the fat. More often than not, though, I fall asleep in front of the television. Others go brain dead while their thumbs type on and on.

When I wake up while watching evening television, around 8:30 pm, or so, it is time to put the animals, and then me, to bed. And, I say so to Pooka and Caleigh: “Time to put the animals to bed.” Given that we live in northern latitudes, the sun sets by 5pm in the winter, and not until 10pm in the summer. My routine is thereby attuned to the seasons’ routine. The three of us go out into the waning day to make sure all of Croft Farm is safe and sound, and all of the denizens are tucked in. This amounts to closing up the poultry coops. It is also when I milk the goats for the second time and give them their second grain feeding.

I cherish, in particular, this time with the goats. We are all rather drowsy by sunset’s hour, and they rarely exude the energy of their afternoon apple-eating frenzy. But their evening hum is a good energy nonetheless. I often like to rest my sleepy head on Faery or Gypsy’s warm flank. I sometimes hug them goodnight, especially any kid I may be keeping at the time whom I can still easily reach my arms around. Leslie Anne would rather I refrain from embracing bucks in the breeding season. This is not an allusion to gay love; the cloying, musky smell clings to skin and clothes. I tend to return Caleigh and Pooka to the house during this time with the goats. If the dogs were to be out, and barking, the goats become alarmed. This way, too, I only hear the breathing and heartbeats of the goats and me, and the occasional call of an owl.

In winter, I’m free before bedtime to sit before the fire and enjoy Leslie’s evening company. In summer, I slog back in the house and kiss Leslie Anne goodnight. In either case I’m in bed by 9pm. I fall asleep with Dooley nestled in the crook of my arm, knowing his purring is the winding of the clock that will wake us to another day.

So there you have the routine, and rite, of my home farm day. The last feeding, like the first of the day, might take a half hour, at most. In total, there is an hour and a half for the animals and an hour and a half for other farm chores. I may be at these jobs longer than these professed times, but I am not counting breaks and diversions.

Shortly before I retired, and knew my farming days were about to begin, I was chatting with a co-worker. This woman was the wife of a man who’d retired ear-

lier and who was doing home farming, to a certain extent. This couple's chickens went on holiday in the fall, or so they told their grandchildren. I'd said to the woman that, perhaps, I was crazy to start farming in retirement, particularly with old age aches already, and asked her how her husband did it. She replied, "He takes a lot of tea breaks."

So, this is my farm routine, with a lot of tea breaks. Same way, every day. The only other days that are special are the weekends. Saturday is date day for Leslie Anne and me. Sure, I still have to do the daily farm chores, but the morning to afternoon is devoted to time for Leslie and me to spend together. Our date most always involves a seaside drive. You see, gleefully this is the only way to drive to and from the farm to town. A 'date' usually includes stops at the hardware store, or garden store, or feed store. But, it also always includes a stop for tea or coffee and a bite to eat. We also plan special outings, though any outing is special when you are in love. Saturday dates generally last through Sunday, and beyond.

So, we continue to grow to see and experience the routines, habits, and repetitive actions of our farm home as living well. We may do things differently when Leslie Anne has retired, and as age tells us each and both what we need to do differently, but a farm is lives that live, day by day, by us. We live a dream that keeps the farm and us wakefully well, and hopefully well into the future.



# Companions Planting

I fondly refer to Croft Farm as ‘little big farm’. There is a scope of farming taking place on this one acre that rivals larger agricultural acreages not in volumes overall, of course, but certainly in the range of farming done and, I believe, the quality and overall yield from the acre. But Croft Farm is not just about putting as many types of farm life as possible together. It is about what is put together and how. It is the difference between a randomly diverse crowd and a gathering of friends. Only if the grouping is companionable do you have, say, a party and not a brawl.

In the kitchen garden at Croft Farm you will see not single, but multiple, varieties of plants growing in the beds. There are carrots in the pea patch, squash amongst the pole beans, peppers in the tomato house, and horseradish in the potato bed. Leeks grow with onions, and lettuce with many other salad greens. Marigolds grow in most of the beds, as do nasturtium. Borage, too, can and does show up amongst many of the vegetables. There’s basil in with the tomatoes and dill in the asparagus and near the fennel. There’s garlic and mints growing with cole crops.

This is called companion planting. Such combinations of plants are grown together to increase crop productivity by not only maximizing the use of space, but also to optimize the space to aid pollination, pest control, root health, feeding the soil, and provide a welcoming habitat for beneficial creatures. It is certainly a welcoming habitat for this farmer.

The notion of companion planting comes from millennia of farming lore and practice, and science. It is done in imitation of the diversity of plants found in

healthy natural ecosystems. Companion planting is, if you will, the peaceful and productive cohabitation of plants to mutual benefit. Just as an ecosystem is greatly defined as healthy by the plants that grow together well in the environment, companion planting is the collected wisdom of promoting the growth of food crops by what we plant with them.

Yet, companion planting is only one aspect of complementary farming. More than the plants we plant together, companioning is, to my thinking and practice, the conscious co-location, co-operation, and collateral support of interdependent life. In agricultural terms, Croft Farm is designed and operated as a polyculture.

As the word polyculture suggests, it is many lives growing together with shared interests. It is the opposite of monoculture, or the large tract, widespread way we've come to think we have to grow our food crops (and closed societies). As the world population increased, we felt compelled to grow more and more of certain foods to feed all those massing hungry mouths. Farmers were motivated, even paid, to grow single crops. Most all commercial crops are grown this way to make huge quantities of food and to make profits, huge (for commerce) or not (for farmers).

Polyculture includes not only companion planting then, but also the practices of multi-cropping, intercropping, and alley cropping. These are all principles of permaculture, the practice derived from observing and patterning of natural ecosystems in the design, development and conduct of human life environments. More simply, permaculture is agriculture (and culture, in general) as taught by nature. In this, as animals, too, are part of natural ecosystems, farm animals, for me, are essential to a polyculture farm home.

There are many sources from which to learn about companion planting, polyculture, and permaculture. I am not the expert to give such information in any detail. Rather, I can only tell you how the life on Croft Farm is included and arranged such that the life of any plant or animal benefits, and is benefitted by, the plants and animals living together. These choices are not based merely on our farm preferences and diet, though these are considerable factors. Polyculture and permaculture are grounded in nature's preferences.

Market gardeners are motivated by what sells well, just as a home farmer might be motivated by personal tastes. For example, Leslie Anne and I, health-food heretics that we may be, do not care for kale and chard. But, we grow kale and chard since goats and sheep and poultry love, love, love them. We haven't, either, developed a real taste for goat meat, but our dogs surely have. What is more important is that the soil likes, and uses, plants like kale and chard. And, the garden particularly favours goat manure and whey, and all the while we have a home source for livestock food and dairy products. The crop is not merely a terminal intent, then, but a staged means of providing for other yields in a cycle that never need end until after the farmer ceases.

I have already described the general layout of Croft Farm. It is designed and built according to distinct proportions and habitats needed by the various life forms in interplay. Moreover, as a one-acre farm, with neighbours, the various animals, fruits, and vegetables are given distinct, and confined, areas. Not only do we not want to have to deal with poultry flying where they are unwanted, goats eating vegetables, and sheep trampling flowerbeds, farm home 'zoning' honours care standards and what each micro-environment prefers. While, for example, I might like to see chickens roaming freely, not only would human neighbours complain if the fowl left the farm, chickens could not roam freely with our dogs, and we would not be able to, as easily, collect chicken eggs and manure.

I have already prefaced my determining of ideal living conditions for livestock. There are only so many of a type of animal that a space can hold and support well. That's why we have three smaller chicken coops rather than one large chicken barn. It is why we raise only the five adult sheep we have and their lambs, and no more. It is why our vegetables grow in raised beds rather than as row crops. What I have not discussed, other than by suggestion, is how polyculture is good for the soil, for the birds and bees, and the general environment.

As with nature and evolution, our farm home is a labour of love in process. Were it not first for love of nature and the web of life, and for one another, our motives for farming would be quite different. Our most impactful care for the earth has to be through how we live on, with, and care for, our little plot of earth. This may not be obvious in an urban environment, where home is a place to sleep and

put your stuff, where food has seemed limitless, pollution is taken for granted as a necessary evil, and where waste is removed from the city through hidden sewage systems and weekly garbage collection. Even recycling gives the illusion that the environment is immune to the creation and profusion of man-made materials, however recyclable. Home farming requires storage, as I've shared, but very little in the way of packaging. (Have you thought how we use the word packaging more to talk about the marketability of products, than the problem of containers?)

Not only does the small scale of Croft Farm make the farm amenable to the physical capacity of an old farmer, it also puts in useful proximity the ingredients needed to feed every living thing in its compass. Every part of the farm can be reached in fewer than one hundred paces. No tractor or all-terrain vehicle is needed. My truck is a farm tool, to be sure, but it rarely, if ever, is needed to get around the farm. The only vehicles needed are a wheelbarrow, or better, a two-wheeled garden cart, and a good pair of waterproof work boots. We do have a ride-on mower, which we are trying to put out of commission. There are though, still, patches of grass in the front and back yards that need trimming in the summer. We did, first, try to manage these areas with a push mower, but such a tool needs a much younger operator. I no longer mow in the orchard and around berry patches, as I've found my feet make the open paths I need for care of these. We are now close to not mowing at all; the ride-on mower sat idle this past summer.

With fences, the various habitats are, and can remain, generally self-contained. And, it is the inhabitants of each area who also know their place. To illustrate, I needed to reclaim a portion of the sheep paddock to allow us to install a new septic field for the guest cottage we were building. I put up a temporary plastic fence that the sheep could have walked over if they'd tried. They didn't try. Once the new cross fence for the sheep paddock was in, I took down the old double gate and rehung it in the new fence. Neither sheep, nor dogs, took advantage of the openings afforded to each other's spaces. In fact, when it was only the two old gateposts standing between the dogs' space and the new septic field soon to be included in their space, they would not enter. My verbal invitation did not make any difference initially. I had to go get the dogs and invite them to come with me. In a similar way, when I expanded the goats' pen to make more room for kids, none of the

goats would cross into the new section, though there is an eight-foot wide opening. I coaxed them in by offering fresh greens from outside the new fence. They now come to the fence whenever they see me in the garden.

It is the farmer who is integrator and mediator; though the farmer, too, hopefully, and fully, is integrated and mediated. Even within each habitat, there are other methods of self-management the animals can participate in.

For example, let me tell you what I learned from our sheep. Sheep, and other animals, excepting pigs and us it seems, relieve themselves in the same places they feed themselves. So it was that I noticed how the ground around the sheep's hay feeder continued to rise and rise. I figured, at first, that sheep were merely messy eaters. So, when I found that I needed to enlarge the sheep shelter, I went out to fork the spilled hay from the area where I planned to expand. As with a push mower, which cuts fine on fine grass, my hayfork could have done that job. Could have done if the hay was not laden with months and months of manure and mud. So, I called on my neighbor John who had recently told me of his proud purchase of a small tractor.

Even John's tractor got stuck in this muck, though he was able to free it and to gradually move this accretion of potential garden soil into a nice heap away from the sheep shed. I looked forward to having easy access to this pile of manure, now mostly composted, to bring to the kitchen garden and flowerbeds. What I didn't look forward to was if I had to call in John and his tractor on a regular basis. I'm all for community interdependency, but not unwarranted dependency. Now, since I was already familiar with other types of tractors, like chicken tractors and rabbit tractors, I got an idea.

No, I was not about to build a pen on sleds or wheels to move the sheep around their paddock. But, I could move their hay around. So, acquiring lengths of aluminum railings from a building reclamation yard, I built a portable hay feeder. The structure, with a V-shape created by two eight-foot railings, was joined with baling twine at their bottoms and to a four-foot railing panel at each end. Assembled like this, the top was just the size of a length of aluminum roofing panel I had. The feeder is weighted on top with a ten-foot 2x8 length of lumber lengthwise placed

midline, over which the nine-foot section of roofing is laid. The panel is held to the feeder with bungee cords. Empty, the entire structure is light enough to allow me to move it by myself, usually by pivoting it on one end and then the other, but I can lift the entire frame, sans roof, all by my old self, if I need to.

Now I do not have to worry about the regular removal of manure from around the feeding area. I just leave the shit where it falls, and move the hay feeder instead. Some of you may be ahead of me as to the elegance of this solution: not only do the sheep fertilize their own paddock, they seed and mulch it with the strewn hay, and till and cultivate the soil as they move around.

You may recall that the sheep paddock was a forested part of the property when we moved here. Grass does not typically grow on forest floors. But, since we had thinned the trees to allow more sunlight, and room to move, it is not only possible to grow grass there, it has begun to happen. In effect, the sheep are growing their own pasture. I may always, nonetheless, need to bring in hay. But, for a one-acre farm, having some ability to grow some animal feed is not only thinkable, but doable.

I haven't started a similar system as yet for the goats, whose feeding area has the same problem. The main constraint is, unlike sheep, goats terribly mind getting wet. Sheep will eat out in the rain; goats will not. So, for now, I do have to rake back the hay spillage in the goat pen to keep at least some of the build-up down. The good news is that the goats, as I've shared, only eat their hay from feeders in the pen. All other feeding of the goats takes place either at the stanchion, where they do not relieve themselves, or around the fence where I'd like them to relieve themselves. So, there is at least a probability that some of their manure is distributed across the entire 1500 square foot pen. I have also taken to, when feeding the goats browse or vegetables, doing so out in their yard away from the hay feeder. Not only do we bring fallen branches into the goat yard, branches we trim also go to them. Goats are particularly fond of Christmas trees. And, cedar branches are the drugs of choice for upset stomachs, especially when you have four stomachs like a goat or sheep.

On a forest farm, such as ours, we partner too with sun and shade. Animals need sun, but need shade even more, especially in the heat of summer. The trees are part of the farm in this way. And, as much of the tree cover is conifers, the acidic soil they create is not only loved by certain plants, like blueberries, strawberries, and potatoes, it is perfect for using manure to adjust the soil's pH for those plants preferring soil more toward the alkaline range (most vegetables are happiest in soil with a neutral pH). Of course, manure is nutrition for most all soils.

Kitchen garden fruits and vegetables also have varying preferences for sun and shade. Heat-loving fruits and vegetables profit in our temperate climate by being grown in spaces that not only have the best exposure to sun, but also which have backdrops of trees, structures, or tall plants that create heat sinks, wind breaks, and reflective surfaces. This, more than aesthetics, was a chief reason for the walled kitchen gardens of yesteryear. Similarly, cool-season crops, like peas and spinach, can have their growing seasons extended by planting them in partially shaded areas, or behind taller plants that prefer full sun.

Very few vegetables are true perennials, though some plants can be allowed to reseed themselves. Many of our salad greens do just that. We have also seen it occur with peas, radishes, parsnips, celery, and herbs, like dill and borage and lemon balm. Some, such as lemon balm (and other members of the mint family), may need to be controlled (rarely possible for long), as one plant will continue to produce all of that plant that you ever want or need, both by roots and by seeds. Some vegetables like cabbages, cauliflower and carrots, being biennial, seed in their second year and, if conditions are right, will sow themselves. I will caution, however, that carrots are wont to cross with the related Queen Anne's Lace, so it is better to collect some seeds, like carrots, instead of allowing self-seeding. But, many garden vegetables will self sow if the seeds survive. Why, I've even had tomatoes reseed into fine tomato plant starts. Still, seed-saving is surer than self-sowing.

I must return, again, to a companion issue in companion planting: which are true companions and which are better only to share the same farm in different places? In the vegetable kingdom, you want to keep your onion bed away from your bean bed, your bean bed away from your beet bed, your pumpkin patch from your potatoes, and watch for other antagonistic pairings.

What about livestock companionship with the farm and other livestock? Were we, for example, to allow the chickens to run free, we could be assured that they would serve us well by devouring a farmful of bug and weed pests. I could feasibly contain the chickens to the sheep paddock, to aid in parasite control, breaking up the soil, and preventing mulching by the spilled hay. As the chickens roamed freely, they would be distributing their own manure, too. But I choose to not clip chicken wings or invite our dogs and birds of prey to free chicken dinners. And, containment allows a place for chicken manure to compost, so it can easily be collected to be used where needed, not where we walk.

It is possible to house more than one kind of fowl, or sheep and goats, for that matter in the same enclosure. I separate our poultry to better ensure against the spread of parasites and disease. A parasite that does not significantly harm one type of fowl, can wipe out others. As well, for breeding purposes, I not only keep chickens, turkeys, and ducks apart, but the three chicken coops allow separating chickens by breed for breeding purebred heritage types. I have, and generally will have, one breed of turkeys or of ducks at a time.

As my Clun Forest sheep are naturally polled, and I remove the horns of the Toggenburg goats, I would have little fear of does and ewes living together in a shared paddock. That changes when either the flock of sheep, or the herd of goats, includes a male. I am fairly sure that (a) my ram would not tolerate goats around his flock; except (b) if he got the notion to breed with the goat does. Cross-insemination does happen, sometimes with viable offspring, since goats and sheep are related closely enough.

I had already mentioned how our ducks have proven to be good companions to the kitchen garden where they live. This, I'm sure would be less likely the case if the vegetables were not grown in raised beds. Even this is not foolproof, as this foolish old farmer can attest. I lost an entire bed of pea plants to our ducks before the first pea pod formed. They saw the opening in the pea netting as a doorway to a green dreamland. I found a nightmare of destruction. So, while I still let the ducks out to waddle around the kitchen garden, their moves are monitored. I'm not saying I've found need to do anything like mount a prison-yard gun turret, but the ducks can and will be sent back to their cell if they can't respect the vegetable

beds. Common wisdom might suggest no ducks in the garden while plants, especially young plants, are growing. Lately I've taken to keeping the ducks out of the vegetable beds altogether during the summer months.

Companion planting, intercropping, succession planting, and crop rotation are all ways of filling the whole. Growing areas don't have the opportunity of ever laying fallow for very long. (Note that even a fallow plot has a lot of life going on.) While some of the vegetable beds may not have anything growing in them over winter months, some do. Carrots, cabbages, parsnips, and the like are regularly left in the beds to be harvested as needed in winter. The perennial herb bed, and perennial vegetables, like asparagus, remain where they are planted for years. The otherwise empty beds are layered with manure and/or wood ash in fall or spring and left 'empty' until the amendments are forked in and the beds replanted. A single bed is also potentially replanted in mid to late summer when spring crops are harvested and fall crops planted.

As the gardens always have food plants underway, there is little time or room for weeds to grow. Some weeding, as I reported earlier, is needed, but actually very little. And some 'weeds', like lamb's quarters, nettle, purslane, shepherd's purse, and even dandelions, are sometimes left in the garden, in small numbers, to benefit the intended vegetables, and all of these are also edible themselves.

The close planting and inter-planting of crops afforded by hand-tended raised beds can easily boost yields per area in excess of the yields from the same space as used for row-cropping, as done in conventional farming. The reason for row farming has less to do with the plants than it does with taking room for tractors and other farming machinery. And, since there is not the regular passage of heavy farm vehicles, or heavy farmers, compacting the soil, these vegetable beds do not require tilling more than with a broadfork. Ducks may damage a crop, but not the beds, and they offer more help than harm in the garden.

For me, the most essential type of companion planting, of course, is pairing the home farmer with the land. By nature, the home and the farm are needed companions. And we, the present farmers, companions for one another, are companions for the farm and the home 'til death do us part'. Death will stop us, and possi-

bly stop the farm; farm home life needs companion farmers. For now, even in death of livestock, plants, and seasons, the life of Croft Farm stays one with the soil, one with the sustainability, and of one whole – in the love we share - always filled and always fulfilling.



# The Art of Manurishment

The late, great comedian, George Carlin, is known, perhaps best, for his reflections on how we use the word “shit”. Albeit a so-called bad word, we have found it a very good word of multifarious use. Carlin, for example, considering ‘shit’ as possibly the most powerful word in the English language. We talk, he said, of things like getting our shit together, having nice shit, and things turning to shit, the many things we call shit that are not feces, even when they could be manure. He also pointed out that we talk of bull shit, dog shit, cat shit, bird shit, whale shit, rat shit, and horse shit wherein none of these refer to animal feces, per se.

I’d like to talk some shit with you. Sensibilities aside, I hope it makes sense that animal waste (humans are animals) contains organic matter, undigested food and a great number of nutrients and enzymes necessary for life. Good shit, eh? Generally, depending on what is ingested by the animal; good stuff yields good shit.

In the feedlots where most commercial meat is raised, there had long been the need to remove and dispose of the manure, somehow. In better cases, it became fertilizer, particularly for nearby farms. In best cases, manure is a source of methane for on-farm power generation. I prefer not to bother with the worst cases. I abhor pollution more than waste.

To be a home farmer means you’d better have your shit together when you have your animals shit together. Each chicken produces approximately a twentieth of a pound of manure per day. Not all that much, right? What about twenty chickens? Or forty? One dairy cow produces twelve pounds of manure per day. That’s well over two tons in a year! (Gets you thinking about your own shit, eh?) So, if you thought there was a lot of ‘shit’ on Croft Farm before, I’m sure you have a

whole new sense. I do not want, nor need, to calculate what I know is a lot of shit. Recall the seventy-unit housing development that was to be built, two people per unit, per acre analogy. The high-rise and the home farmer have a lot of shit to deal with.

What I do do with all that do-do is make sure to get it together where it will do the most good. The reason we refer to losing control of our bowels as ‘soiling oneself’ is because that is the encounter of the closest kind with our own shit, which in the end, and after, is soil. Good soil, while needing inorganic compounds, is richest when it contains organic compounds. Organic compounds, simply put, are decaying organic, that is, once living, things. The life contained in the creature, as well as the organic matter called food passing through it, is both kinetic and potential energy. Manure captures a goodly amount of good shit for the soil.

Technically speaking, manure is not only the animal’s feces (and urine, and bedding), it can be the bones, blood, and entire carcass, too. That is another reason we have buried animals on Croft Farm. But, while we refer to manure as fertilizer, again technically speaking, that is a misnomer. Fertilizer, rather, is a soil amendment made from artificial sources other than living matter. There is, of course, ‘green manure’, what is commonly called compost, which is composted plant matter. But, is there any other difference between manure and fertilizer with respect to growing food?

Well, it depends if you want to grow food a few times, or year after year. You see, fertilizers only feed the plant, while manure feeds the soil. So, you could, as is done in much commercial food production, simply fertilize the ground every year. Wouldn’t that assure good food crops? Well, good crops for the time being, perhaps, but not necessarily good food. Oh, it may look good, but looks, as is said, are deceiving.

Commercial fertilizers are of mineral origin. Essentially they need to be mined, made from mining or industrial waste, or are made from fossil fuels. Truth be told, fertilizers are actually higher in nutrient content than manure. But, fertilizers are simple salts and only contain a few specific nutrients, sometimes only one nutrient. But, those simple nutrients go directly to the plant, and fast. Manure is, instead,

very complex, contains all the nutrients, but takes a minimum of thirty days to decompose, that is, to be ready to release the nutrients into the soil. This is a main reason that manure, animal or plant, needs to be composted, or at least aged.

The advantage of manuring the soil, rather than fertilizing the plants, is the difference between a healthy ecosystem, and a dead zone. Not only does regular fertilizer use require more and more of it, but the repeated applications also cause build-up of toxic metals and salts. While I indicated that fertilizers are made from materials that are mined, or from fossil fuels, the raw material for fertilizer manufacture often comes second-hand, from manufacturing waste.

Up to a third of that industrial waste comes from the manufacture of steel. This waste is used as fertilizer, sometimes directly, for its high zinc content, as zinc is an essential nutrient for plant growth. Of course, this same waste contains lead, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, nickel, and dioxin. Yes, these are all naturally occurring, but not in these concentrations. This toxin build-up in the soil weakens the soil, the toxins are taken up into foods grown in such soil, and also leached away, into our waterways. In time, the fertilized farmland will no longer support life. The food so grown may not support life. As the waters so killed will not.

I trust you've deduced that we use no fertilizers on Croft Farm. What you might not guess is that we also don't set up composting, at least not formally. Oh, yes, well, there is an old compost bin that was here when we arrived. I do throw more fibrous plant wastes into it, like dried vines even the goats won't eat. I do know the pile is healthy as it used to annually send up a covering of potato plants. The ducks have ended that. Whose idea it was to compost raw potatoes I'll never know. I had also put grass clippings on this pile until I realized that the sheep love lawn salad. Whatever green yard and kitchen 'wastes' we have become another source of animal feed.

I long ago noted that, if you want to find the easiest way to do something, ask a lazy person. Not one so lazy as to never get a job done, but one who looks for the means of least effort. I am not lazy by the former definition, but I do represent and enjoy a life of ease, especially in old age. Ease, of course, does not mean no

work. There is plenty of, typically heavier, work in managing manure on even a small farm such as ours. But there are easier ways to do it.

For example, I do not compost manure before use. What? Am I not afraid that ‘hot’ manures will burn the plants? Of course, I would be afraid, but it hasn’t happened yet. I do allow manure to age. This allowance is primarily passive, as I arrange for the manure for Croft Farm to age in place. For one in old age who wants to live out his days aging in place, the approach is most complementary. Of the animals we keep, poultry manures are considered ‘hot’, which basically means you don’t want to put these on growing areas while the plants are growing. That doesn’t mean fresh poultry manure couldn’t be spread on beds that will lay fallow for the winter. As it is, the poultry manure I collect for distribution is already aged due to how the animals are kept. So, I also have found nothing to fear in spring applications of these manures.

Sheep and goat manure are considered ‘cold manures’, i.e., they can be put on the garden without fear of harming crops. For the sheep, I’ve already discussed how most of their manure is spread throughout their paddock to feed the would-be pasture. Even if I wanted to collect this manure it would be tedious, as well as generously mixed with hay, meaning I would be sowing hayseed, which I’ve inadvertently done in vegetable beds. As it is, only about a third of sheep manure is typically recoverable. That is, unless you know where to get the good stuff.

In the sheep shed, there is no hay spread on the dirt floor, but I do provide softwood shavings for bedding intermittently. After the winter, which is the season in which sheep are most likely to use the shelter at all, there is a rich layer of, predominately, aged manure. As the accrual tends to build up the height of the floor, I need to scrape the excess off even if I didn’t use the manure. I do most of my manuring of our vegetable beds with sheep manure in late winter, as fall manuring is difficult with so many vegetables still producing. I also make manure ‘tea’ by mixing equal parts of manure and water in a covered plastic tub. This is particularly handy for use in the tomato house, as it is awkward at best to try to spread manure in a small, enclosed building.

Poultry manure is one of the best manures, though sheep and goat manures are close competitors. The manure from our turkeys and ducks is typically spread on planting areas right outside their respective coops. Turkey manure is spread on an ornamental garden outside the Church of the Wholly Turkey. The climbing hydrangea in that garden had never bloomed until I began this practice, and tuberous plants have multiplied there. Duck manure has been used primarily on the two hazelnut shrubs behind the duck house. But, remember, too, that the ducks go about their winter days spreading manure all over the kitchen garden.

Chickens, conveniently, do most of their manure production while roosting. The roost manure is captured, and aged, in droppings pits. These are simply the enclosed areas under the raised roosts. Double back doors make for easy collection of the aged manure every six months. We also do collect chicken manure, mixed with softwood shavings, from the coop floors (deep litter). I have tended to use the chicken manure mostly for our fruit trees and berry patches.

Goat manure? Goat manure is of approximately the same richness as sheep manure. The pellet form of goat and sheep manure makes it easy to apply in gardens and horticultural plantings most anytime. However, we never manure past the halfway point in a vegetable's or fruit's days-to-maturity, avoiding any undesirable effects on the harvested produce. But, as you are gathering, I like growing "shitty food". The dryer goat manure, in conveniently produced pellets, is easily sprinkled on the soil. That is, if these have not been mixed with months of spilled hay. So, let's say, rather, that goat pellets are easily spread on the soil by the goats, away from their hay feeders. For garden use, I first need to collect the pellets where the goats or sheep have spread them, apart from accumulated hay. This is rather like sweeping or raking marbles. Once collected, though, the pellets pretty much spread themselves on the bed as you pour.

I mentioned how I use softwood shavings as a bedding material for our animals. I have used wood chips and spent hay as well. I know some people may use sawdust. I've even found shredded paper a very good bedding material, especially for nest boxes for the chickens. Yes, tiny strips of paper do stick to the eggs, but the paper itself, with today's non-toxic, soy-based inks, is harmless to the chickens. Except, you do run the risk that the chickens will become well-read.

When it comes time for the manure-laden bedding to be forked or shoveled, hauled, and spread on a garden bed, I have found the softwood shavings to be easiest to work with, both in the slogging and in the soil. Conversely, wood chips will give you splinters when you put your hands in the soil, something I would otherwise heartily hope that you do often. The spent hay in bedding is just waiting and ready to sprout its seeds in the garden. And, sawdust is not only dusty when dry, it clumps and mats readily when wet. Wood shavings do stick to things, but I'd stick with them.

Some people are wont to raise a stink about the smell of manure. They've driven along the highway and had to close their car windows for miles as they approach and pass places where livestock are kept. I would like to assure them that smell is merely the SNAFU of CAFOs. Concentrated Animal Feed Operations certainly are regulated to ventilate their facilities, out away from their facilities.

Yet again, perhaps some of potential manure poo-pooers, have been to a poorly kept farm. Everybody's shit stinks. If odour is your only objection, I can assure you that we, and our guests, seldom smell our animals' manure. The chicken yards can raise a stink when the first rains of autumn fall. The chicken coops, through regular provision of fresh bedding (deep litter method), turning the droppings in the droppings pit, and housing small flocks, exude nothing but country air and charm.

I will admit that ducks, being waterfowl, keep things wet, and therefore their yards could get a high level rank. Were it not for Declan and the Maeves', or Magnus and the Maggies, daily roamings around the kitchen garden, our air quality could be quickly demoted from country air to nasty error. Inside the duck coop could be the worst. But, it typically smells like pine shavings.

Sheep and goats have not always been thought to have good sense, but they can be kept easily without bad scents. Their dry, pelleted poo, if amassed and sodden, will stink. My hay feeder tractor greatly minimizes this with our ram and the ewes, and all their lambs. The sheep poo in the sheep shed ages readily into the crumbly dry manure we collect in the spring and late summer. Goat manure is quite similar, in that it has little in the way of a bad odour, even though I do have that prob-

lem of manure build-up around the goat mangers. The good news is that the hay they spill when eating prevents ammonia build-up, which is the greater part of the unpleasantness of manure odour.

I've learned that it is in raising our own eggs and meat that we are able to grow our own vegetables and fruit well. I know we would not be using fertilizer even if we were not raising our own livestock. I would likely source manure from a livestock farmer. I might even buy it by the sanitized sack from the garden store. Maybe. But not all manure is created equally. It is unwise in the simplest sense to use manure from animals (such as humans) that have been fed antibiotics, medications, growth hormones, and other such chemicals (including any additives in processed foods). As supplements, additives, medications, and such have become the industry standard for commercial farm production of eggs and meat animals, it is in your food interests to not put their shit into your soil.

I will never be a soil scientist, or a capital-S Scientist of any sort. I have, nonetheless, studied and applied science in growing food as I have studied and applied manure. This is the art of manurishment: that the basest of material can be transformed into beautiful food.

You don't have to take this shit from me, of course. Get to know shit for yourself. Then help me spread this shit around so we no longer have fertile lies.



# Going from Place to Plate

Home farming is a holy terroir, and wholly so.

The locavore ethos tells us you can taste the place of origin in what's on your plate, taste if it grew locally. Even before people who only ate what was raised at home or nearby were called locavores, the French term terroir was applied in wine appellation, and later in referring to the locale of what some have called artisanal crops: coffee, tea, chocolate, hops, maple syrup, cannabis, and others. Having had the opportunity to do unpaid taste research, I can attest that some places have more and better taste than others.

Terroir, as it is about how place shows up on our plates, is about the unique types and flavours in the food one may eat. The premise is that the taste of foods that grow in one area cannot be replicated in another, and therefore offer unique tastes, unique foods. Such foods have, so far, come from far away more likely than from a local backyard. This may have much more to do with marketing than uniqueness. Environmental awareness, now, has alerted us to the trade-off; yes, these foods may have a great terroir, but that terroir is a long way to transport. Any arable environment will have a good terroir for some foods. As many of the environmental factors for what foods grow where, and where they grow best, is part of the definition of terroir, it is helpful to know, and choose by, those factors when you plan what food you will grow for yourself. The environmental factors are:

- Climate
- Soil type

- Topography and landscape
- What companions grow near

We cannot ultimately control climate; we've already shown that. What we can do is work with the local climate. At Croft Farm, we are blessed with a temperate, Mediterranean climate. This means the temperatures are rarely too cold, rarely too hot, the winters heavy with rain, the summers dry and clear. To illustrate, the plants supported near Croft Farm range from Californian Garry Oaks in their northernmost range, and Alaskan Sitka Spruce in its southernmost range. Some folks on Vancouver Island successfully grow oranges and bananas, and in the same climate that we have had trouble getting tomatoes and peppers to grow to ripeness. All take human interventions and enhancement of micro-climates.

Soil, once you get your hands dirty, looks and feels, and smells, like whether or not it will grow good food. Rich humus is dark in decaying matter. Our raised beds are not native soil, though the immediate native soil is a good sandy loam, albeit rocky in places. The soil in the beds came instead from a local source, rich forest topsoil.

I told you how I had dug quite a number of flagstones up from old garden paths before I put our raised beds in place. I may have then mentioned that the existing soil was quite stony. As we were going to use raised beds anyway, we had to bring in more soil, so we acquired the topsoil, a very black sandy loam that had already been fortified with fish manure. Living in a marine environment is an enviable position to land. To build the beds, I used 2X10 lengths of red cedar, a wood plentiful here, from a local mill. Each of the key beds is 8 feet long by 4 feet wide. Before filling each frame, I laid down cardboard to reduce grass and weed intrusion in the bed. The first year, we did not otherwise amend this soil.

As also mentioned, our topography is that we are between the mountains and the sea in a quite narrow, bottomland part of a valley that extends and broadens to the north. Being coastal and alluvial, the rain is regularly traveling from the sea to the mountains and over and back again. What is somewhat fortuitous is that most of the voluminous precipitation occurs in winter and rarely in summer. Dry, warm summers host luscious gardens, as long as the water supply is bounteous.

While water restrictions are common in many parts of western North America, and other parts of our world, Croft Farm's aquifer is believed quite large and ancient. Yet, with dry summers, and ever not knowing the next year's snowpack, water wisdom is sacred.

In discussing companion planting, and even earlier, I more than alluded to learning from the nature in, and of, one's place. A farm home is habitats we learn to assist in a given environment. A farm home on a prairie at the same latitude as Croft Farm is going to have more actual hours of direct sun due to the absence of tall trees, and mountains. I was, in many ways, inspired to grow the variety of food we are able to grow by learning what others in our valley are growing well. The valley suggests and mostly determines, but does not dictate, what might be grown.

So, terroir as it relates to place is manifest in the food grown in that place. Contrary to 'foodie' and 'locavore' promotions, terroir is not a guarantee of good food. Perhaps, this is why many North American vintners dispute the concept. They are right, too: place is only one side of the terroir tetrahedron. Terroir has come to necessarily include the human interventions we call farming.

From selection of seed and plant stock, to companion planting, to methods of cultivation, to soil amendment, terroir is subject to any number of other farmer variables. All I know, in the end, is that we have come to prefer homegrown foods, especially our own. The foods we grow ourselves, contain the consciousness of place and the benefit of how we grow. It is this care of the farmer in the place that best determines the trial and error of terroir.

It does not take a plant scientist to tell one what grows well in one's eco-region. But, plant scientists and other farmers, can help. Certainly, it is wisest to secure seeds locally that are from plants grown locally, the longer grown locally the better. If you can't find seeds or plant stock for a food you wish to grow, you could source seeds from anywhere in the world. I just know that the most successful food I've grown is from very local sources, and the results are out of this world.

Of course, the best and most local seed for the home farm is seed saved from our own favoured home farm crops. We have not successfully, as yet, nor may we ever, get to using only our own seed stock. We can, nevertheless, be fairly well as-

sured that seeds we need, acquired from other local farmers, and other sources saving local seed, will be amongst the very best to grow on our home farm. Yet, even in this, micro-climate variables and how we farm will make a difference for good or not.

In the previous chapter I talked of use of our own animals' manure to feed and build the growing medium in the kitchen garden. I have also mentioned using wood ash. This ash is solely from our woodstove and from locally felled wood, presently from just across the road. Wood ash is used for liming soil, sweetening acidic soil for the many vegetables that won't do well if the soil is too acidic. Wood ash is an excellent source of lime, potassium (potash) and trace elements. It is sprinkled evenly over the soil to be sifted in. And, lest it be discounted, the fact that I do not turn over the soil, but allow the tines of a broadfork to sift the amendments into the soil is another factor in a Croft Farm terroir.

What do the terroir people say about such things? If terroir means "land' earth", why would the farmer matter? Acknowledgment has come forth that such human interventions are, indeed, essential to any definition of terroir. In this, the 'land' that is terroir is also necessarily the farmer. So, unless we were to only eat food growing naturally in the wild, the quality of our food is as much farmer as it is farmland, though even the best farmers are greatly challenged by unwelcoming land and climate, poor seed and poor weather.

Croft Farm is not a Garden of Eden. While we can at many times of the year harvest fresh food of some type from the kitchen garden, we do not live on a diet of solely fresh or raw food. However good the place we call home, and however good the potential food yielded, most foods we eat are prepared foods, albeit home-prepared foods. Whether dried or frozen, cooked and canned, seasoned or not, the home in farm home is the place of preparation, but not a food factory.

Good cooks, ultimately, cannot make ultimately bad food good. Bad cooks can certainly make good food bad. The good home farmer is very often, by choice and necessity, a good cook. Why else go to all the trouble of growing one's own food if one does not do one's own cooking, and practice to do it well? Prepared foods are

not a problem unless they are poorly preserved, poorly prepared, or unnecessarily over-prepared for reasons other than eating, such as long shelf-life.

Many of the foodstuffs we use at Croft Farm, and need, in preparing our own eating are still store-bought. From sugar to flour, to spices and salt, condiments and oils, coffee and tea, and the like, and also exotic fruits like oranges and bananas, we intentionally, but thoughtfully, complete our diet. Not only are many of these ingredients needed to prepare food at home, as in bread baking and cheese making, others are needed to supplement and assure a diet of foods we like, but could never grow. But, roasted coffee beans are all we need to make our coffee, and flour and yeast, and rennet all we need for home baking and cheese making, and seasonings we ourselves grow and combine are all the additives and variety we need in our diet.

As said, we have purchased freezers, a food processor, a dehydrator, and cheese-making supplies, among other kitchen appurtenances, which allow us to best process the foods we grow and optimally prepare the foods we eat. The kitchen of the farm home is the best detour from a dependency on supermarkets and food factories.

In relating my list of 100s of limits of home farming, I should have included about a hundred hours or so, over the year, in food preservation and for such things as bread making and cheese making. At the time of the lists I was focusing on what this old farmer was finding to be the limits in the demands of home farming. As Leslie Anne is also quite involved, through canning and drying food in particular, I must again remind myself and readers that home farming is a life best shared.

While Leslie still holds a full-time job, and one that requires not only an hour commute each way but also evening commitments, I presently do most of the cooking. I like doing this for so many reasons, on so many levels. Cooking is my living connection in going from what grows on our place to what we place on our plates. I couldn't deprive Leslie Anne of this connection. She often is our weekend chef, while I fetch ingredients for her from the garden or freezer. And, while I am

the bread baker for our home, Leslie Anne is often in the kitchen preparing other baked goods, for me, as she doesn't eat them herself, for dietary reasons.

We also purchase volumes of some fresh fruits in season, for jams and such, from area farms. I had already mentioned that we buy pork from a neighbour's farm. Neither Leslie Anne nor I are fishermen, so we purchase our seafood from locals who are. We also sporadically go to our very exceptional local Farmers' Market. But, honestly, we seldom buy there. It is not for lack of quality or desire, but because much of what we find there we grow ourselves or don't eat. Market farmers very much need local support, often to support home farming. Our own home farm is so small that what surplus we may sell can be done at the farm gate.

Unless you have served yourself and loved ones a homegrown meal, I can only tell you that what you taste is not only tasted by tongue and nose. Your eyes savour the food and may become teary, not merely from your earth-pungent onions or fresh herbs, but with joy. Homegrown eating is the joy of life embodied. The energy expended with and from working the earth is renewed. We can't get much more grounded than this.

But the link between place and plate is not a completed circle until food grown is returned to growing more food. I am not advocating the use of humanure, or 'night soil' as it has been called, especially for those of us who eat meat, or who consume any variety of pharmaceuticals or 'nutritional supplements'. And, remember, whatever is in your food, or whatever you ingest, is in your shit. I do know that our septic system is there to remove these, as well as it might. I can report that our septic field displays deeper green growth than other uncultivated areas of the farm.

I have suggested there may be no need for home farm composting. Unless the home farm does not raise livestock. If we prepare food that is truly healthy and earth-friendly, the yields from food preparation and from food uneaten by us are food for our animals. While it is frowned upon to put meat or cooked food into compost bins, I feel very good to put these into our dogs. They, too, get the joy of home farming. As for uncooked vegetable and fruit scraps, chickens, sheep, and especially goats relish these, and all like some cooked foods, too, like porridge.

Other feeds for our animals are sourced from as close to home as possible. The hay, which is the most staple food for the sheep and goats, is grown on a farm about a half-hour away that has grown hay for dairy animals for over 125 years. The grain and seed feeds are produced on Vancouver Island from British Columbia sources, though some include ingredients from other parts of western Canada. Whenever possible, and as available, all of our animals also enjoy our farm home vegetables and fruit fresh.

We have the added honour of knowing that friends and neighbours enjoy our farm's eggs and meats. We have also shared produce and some cheeses, to happy reception, amongst our community of acquaintances. What grows on our place, what we place on our plates, and the place we love to learn to live with, shows us our place in the world. May we always have this plate full.

It is reported that certified organic food, grown almost as good as we grow, is more nutrient rich. I'll take others' word for this; I don't ever think I've seen nutrients any more than I've ever seen a calorie. Yet, we are very rich in nourishment. I say this only because, since beginning home farming, we always have good food in our home. And, we have enough good food to require extra storage, as well as selling and giving some food away. I have the belief that our homegrown food is more nourishing, too, in that we are nourished in the acts of growing food. As home farmers, we nourish the land and soil, the livestock and plants, to assure a nourishing environment, diet, and lifestyle.

We are nourished, too, by the knowledge that we are doing something that much of humanity in ages past did so that we would live. Growing food in old age, even if we had or had not grown food when younger, is a recognition that what is on our plates be recognised as our lives. In the circle of nourishment is a prayer of thanksgiving.



# The Mutiny of the Bounty

I remember how, when Leslie Anne and I first talked of starting a farm, I felt embarrassed to tell her that I was not sure that a farm, one that we could afford and manage, would ever support us. The model of the modern-day farmers market gives the illusion that people are living on farms and supporting themselves this way. They are, but not in the way that my wife, and others, might have thought.

The greater reality is that even commercial farmers are not able to always, entirely support themselves and their farms financially. The old saw, that it takes money to make money, in a commercial world is true. We will have likely spent (hopefully, invested?) a couple hundred thousand dollars turning this one-acre parcel of land into Croft Farm. While much of that is going to the costs in building a holiday cottage for paying guests, it is easy to spend this much money developing home acreage for one's use, whatever the use. The irony, of course, is that to offer lodging on our farm may be the primary way to afford to farm for food and continue monetary earnings in retirement. It is, of course, only in a monetary culture that post-retirement earnings, in addition to pensions, investments, and retirement savings accounts are necessary to many. I would love to obtain my living needs without money. I know that such a time in our history ever returning is improbable, at best. It is not impossible.

As my primary intent and objective in developing a home farm was to attempt to grow as much of our own food as we might, I was only hopeful that we might supplement some food types so we didn't have to purchase as much of those. For example, if we raised chicken, we would have some eggs and some chicken meat most of the time. Similarly, as initially contemplated, sheep would provide us with

some lamb for some of our meat needs, and some milk for some of our dairy needs, and some wool for some we weren't sure. We could grow some of our potatoes, some of our beans, some squash, and so on. I never truly contemplated, outside of indulgent fantasy, trying to grow a cash crop.

Oh, there is one exception. Our part of the world is one of the few and better areas for growing blueberries well. As blueberries are a food that loves acidic soil, and we have a generous swath of acidic ground, I thought the blueberries would like their patch behind the stand of Douglas fir along the front of our acre. As blueberries are woodland shrubs originally, they are known to grow appreciably well in partial sun. I planted thirty-five blueberry plants, in neat rows, in this waiting patch. While I took care to give a serving of fish soil to the bottom of each hole, the bushes therein planted had failed to thrive.

So far. Oh, the blueberry bushes have grown. Not lushly, and just enough to encourage their further care, throwing out a few very tasty berries just to keep me interested. We learned, while our blueberry patch has struggled, some recent years have been bad for established blueberry growers as well. We also noted that most growers raise blueberries on berms of soil. I had thought of transplanting our thirty-five plants that I had planted on flat ground. Then I sat down and that thought went away.

We have, instead, begun a concerted regime of blueberry benefactoring. Good, aged chicken manure was applied in the autumn. Its further breakdown gave winter moderation to the roots, as well as rain-borne nutrients. In time, this method, I thought, would form earth berms like the successful growers use. Then, realizing the poor growth in the blueberries was, in part, due to our rat problem, rats were eliminated. Then, to assist us with the blueberry patch, the ducks moved in, allowing both year-round manuring and bug control. We're beginning to harvest more blueberries for our enjoyment, but not to sell. In the meantime, blueberry bounty and cashing in are things I can let go of if I sit some more.

There are known farm home bounties that we wanted to avoid, however. There is the infamous reputation of homegrown zucchini rapidly spreading through major corporations, left on desks and in office chairs, in unlocked cars, fill-

ing lunchroom counters by late summer. And, just how many radishes can two people eat in that vegetable's brief heyday? I forgot to look up how many eggs one person consumes. I never knew that I'd have to figure out what to do with a daily gallon of raw goat milk. It is not only illegal to sell raw milk, it is also not permitted, officially, to even give it away. My first twelve apple trees gave me a total of six apples in their fifth year. But they weren't old enough to produce well for yet another two years. What then, and later? I do like cider.

So, I'm sure that some home farmers set out with the plan to become a commercial operation, others become such without planning, and others, like us, will sometimes have surpluses we want to find homes for.

Just like the real experience of counting chickens before they hatch, the prospect of bounty, and lack thereof, is a farmer's constant companion. The frog in my pocket tempts me with the promise of all the meat, dairy, vegetables, and fruits we will ever need.

One day our first lambs of the season were born. Alice gave birth to two boys, Padraic and Columb. Columb was dead when I found them. I know I'd become a farmer because, while mourning this young life just ended, I was also cognizant of having one less meat animal. In my work in social services, I have seen a lot of senseless death. As I dug Columb's grave at the edge of the kitchen garden, hearing Alice cry for him, I was struck how, somehow, this little lamb's death made sense.

I suppose nature's benevolence in sheep is the regular occurrence of multiple births. It doesn't make death and loss of even one lamb any easier, but it does put the tenuousness and struggle of life in perspective. So, whether it is bred sheep or goats, or poultry eggs in the incubator or under a broody hen, I can't help but think of all possibilities as maximized: what if they all live, what if they all die?

Vegetable seed packets are one of the unintentional purveyors of bountiful promise. Only the best looking of the seed variety's plant is pictured. One three inch by four inch packet of seeds may contain hundreds of such promises. By the time you or I have purchased this season's seeds, those seeds are already beginning to lose their viability. Fortunately, hundreds of seeds in a packet is a good insur-

ance policy, all else considered, that the packet will yield at least some of that vegetable, and it may or may not look like its photograph.

Often, even though I do succession planting - planting and re-planting particular seed types over several weeks within the plant's growing season - I still, sometimes, end up with leftover seeds. Being of a frugal disposition, I save these seeds and have successfully planted them in a subsequent growing year. On average, seed germination rate declines each year, though seeds generally remain viable for 2-3 years, some up to five years. Seeds, of course, need to be stored properly in a cool dry place to assure optimum lifetimes. Some say corn seed won't be good the next year, and tomato seeds may germinate after as many as eight years.

Old farm wisdom suggests that enough seed is planted so that as much as half will be for the birds. While birds, including our ducks, are wont to eat seed starts, if not the seeds themselves, this ravaging is less than feared, but the advice is good. Such a plan is not to feed the birds, of course. That is their business. But, planting twice as many seeds does better assure adequate germination and a sufficient harvest. Many of these starts are thinned away, too, to allow optimum room for the plants you cultivate to harvest. Thinnings are chicken candy.

Some seeds, like beans and corn, are large enough to allow the hand farmer to plant these to the desired spacing distances. Doing so may mean that you never need to thin the crop. But it usually means you need to replant in the gaps where seeds did not germinate. Planting more than enough assures the starts will more likely concurrently yield the number of plants needed for eventual harvest. Other seeds, like carrots, parsnips, and tomatoes, for example, are of such a small size that it is difficult at best to plant them for the growth spacing they will need. Tomatoes, if grown from seed, then, are best started with a few seeds each in peat pots, or similar starter pots. Other small seeds that are directly sown into the garden are sown with the knowledge that they will need to be thinned. Trying to sow these to grow into exact spacing requirements is a fool's task.

Oh, I have tried. And I have been foolish, creating more work for my aging back and knees than they appreciate. I have been duped into buying seed tape, once. None, I repeat, none, of those seeds germinated. My wife also bought me a

little seed spoon that, even with no one watching, I would be embarrassed to use. Other seeds, like beet seeds, come as multiple seeds in one. It would likely kill the seed to try and separate these. So, I like to think of planting vegetable seeds as another form of companion planting. It is rather like a nursery of children, better entertained by one another than by any adult present.

For plants that reseed themselves, you can be assured they are not reading vegetable planting guides. From a few initial borage plants, I have borage popping up wherever I want, and don't want. Lemon balm appears at great distances from the parent plant. Some vegetables, like parsnips and chard, and salad greens, will self seed and feed us for years. Carrots, too, mating with the native Queen Anne's Lace as they do, but not always. Some vegetables, like radishes, potatoes, and salad greens typically stay in the bed where first planted, even if you no longer want them there.

To assure we have as much chance at bounty as we might, vegetables are planted in different beds each year. I thought about using a formal crop rotation cycle, but as I've gotten older I only have enough memory to keep track of so many things. In fact, I forgot where I'd saved the garden plans I'd done in previous years. My memory is not yet so bad that I don't recall what was planted in a bed in the year just passed. Typically, the vegetables still growing in the bed when spring comes round aid that memory. Or, there is enough stubble and vegetable detritus left in a bed to remind me what last grew there. The entire farm often serves as an auxiliary memory for what I'd done last, or for what needs to be done next.

Now, rather than follow a regimented system of crop rotation, I have taken to an easier system of crop sequencing. The sequence, in simple doggerel, is:

- If the bed was used for leafy food (salad greens, spinach, cabbage, etc.),
- replace these foods with plants that fruit (tomatoes, peppers, squash, etc.),
- replace the fruits with edible roots (carrots, parsnips, beets, onions, etc.),
- follow roots with beds of legumes (beans, peas, clover, etc.),
- leaving legumes, leafy foods renew.

Or, if you want to remember another way, think of any plant as four components: leaf, fruit, root, soil. Plants leaf before they fruit, fruits fall to the roots, roots reach for the soil (nitrogen fixers).

Or, you can Google ‘vegetable crop rotation’.

Some plants, it is said, should or should not be planted in the same place twice. Some sources make it sound like, if you’ve planted potatoes, for example, in a small garden, you may never plant a potato there again. Tomatoes actually seem to like growing in the same spot year after year. This is convenient if, like me, you have built a tomato house over your tomatoes. Potatoes, as just said, should not be planted in the same place twice...unless you change the nature of the place.

I’d already mentioned how potatoes like to plant themselves in the same place, for years. Witness the russets in our retired compost bin. Or the spudlings that might still sprout in the first bed I’d planted potatoes. My experience is telling me, if the soil is healthy, and companion plants planted, potatoes can, and will, grow well where they have grown well before. Scab does appear, but does not affect palatability. My experience, of course, is not complete. By amending and tending our potato growing areas, it appears most pests and diseases do not move in. Knowing they can and might move in, I do change where I plant our potatoes, just not annually.

That brings up the story of a shortcut to bounty that took a right turn. You may have heard of, or read about, even tried, various touted methods of container growing of potatoes. The basic idea is, if you plant potatoes in an enclosed container and you continue to pile soil on top of the plants, building the container higher as you go, potatoes will grow all up and down and all around these lengthening buried vines. It is advised that, rather than an open mound that merely spills over, some containment be used. Some have used old tires stacked one on the other, boxed frames that fit on top of one another, or wire cages. There may be other schemes, but I chose to build my potato tower in a cage of fence wire, as I had a short length of fencing I’d saved.

On a one-acre parcel every bit of land must benefit the aims of home farming. Vertical growing is one way to do this. In urban thinking, why else would we build

skyscrapers on one-acre city blocks? Vertical gardening is more advised. For example, I prefer to grow pole beans rather than bush beans, and I grow indeterminate, vining tomatoes rather than determinate, bush types. I train squashes, as much as they will go along with it, to climb beanpoles. But, like me, not all plants want to grow too far above terra firma.

First lesson: don't try to build the potato tower all at once.

My potatoes apparently wanted to be ground dwellers. Though I had carefully, even meticulously, slowly added lasagna-like layers of soil followed by straw, followed by a little manure, followed by soil, and layered in the potato starts as I did, my eye-full tower was not to be. It almost was. When the two-and-a-half-foot diameter cage was nearly to a full height of four feet, it toppled. That was the start of my new potato bed, or should I say, potato snake.

By the time I was able to undo and remove the wire cage, the pile had taken to a winding path. I neatened it up and, having more ingredients for my now-fallen potato tower, I extended the snaking row until it indeed looked like a garden serpent. I gave it a face of stones and driftwood.

I have since, yet again, lengthened the potato snake. I have also started another two beds for potatoes using hugelkultur. This is a system of raised bed planting in which a base layer of decaying matter, often including logs, is built up, and over which soil is mounded. While potatoes don't like heavily manured soil, our potatoes, despite a hot dry summer, fared well in the medium. I will eventually connect the two new potato beds, forming another serpent. What is the temptation of two serpents in our garden of eatin'?

While every farmer, I'm guessing, is interested in raising as large a quantity of crops as possible, the quality of crops, to my thinking, is the better measure of the quality of life, both before and after harvest.

As farmers, we make a lot out of what we've got. In some ways Leslie Anne and I don't necessarily eat as much food, in the same variety or in the same quantity, as we did when we lived in the city. For example, we found ourselves eating less beef, and more lamb and chicken. Being now nearer fishing boats, we eat

more seafood. Being in a rural area, we eat out less often. We eat less snack food because there is much more real food in the house, or steps away in the garden.

As Leslie Anne and I were both born under the sign of Capricorn, qualities of hard work, good eating habits, good health, and longevity are said in-born. The qualities formed over our lifetimes, too, we trust, have amounted to the lifestyle we are learning as we go, before we're gone. We both, however, are constitutionally haunted by worries, especially financial worries, but are more often counting our blessings. Bounty is, then, a desirable quantity for us.

The word bounty first meant 'goodness', before it took on the notion of a reward paid for a soldier enlisting and then a reward paid for apprehending criminals. Instead of using the word 'bounty' as reward for when our work is done, we use the word 'pension'. In retirement, though, it is rarely from a pension alone that anyone lives well. Other forms of accrued, or engendered, richness are needed to fulfill a life as well lived. In our case, our life is quite good. But our life is bountiful because of the farm. The bounty from one's farm home is horn-of-plenty bounty.

I had only eaten pheasant once that I can recall before farming. A recent New Years Eve dinner featured a roast pheasant for each of us. Rather than a once each year feast, turkeys and hams have been regular fare. Pumpkin pies are enjoyed throughout the winter and into spring. And pumpkin bread, and pumpkin corncakes. Rack of lamb is a common menu item from our kitchen. A green vegetable on our city dinner plate might have been anemic broccoli or pale peas. Now vegetables come in many vibrant colours, bold shapes, and a palette of flavours. Raspberries show up regularly in summer salads, as do beets. Herbs are freshly clipped yearlong as we cook and as we make salads.

Supermarkets offer a lot of variety; farm homes afford bounty.



# Change to Stay the Sameness

Never greet an older person with, “How are you?”

The question is taken as a literal interest in one’s health status. In fact, if you only heard the intonation of the greeting, you could readily know the relative age of the addressee:

- How are YOU? - usually spoken to a younger person;
- How ARE you? - spoken to middle-aged people and, for a short while, retirees;
- HOW are you? - the sincerest question, asked of people 75 and older.

If you thought that a routine was something you wanted to escape in retirement, think again. Creatures of habit that we are, suggests that how we live in old age is pretty much wrinkled into our brains and lives by the time we reach old age. Assuming otherwise average health, the path in old age will follow the earlier, most trodden path. Home farmers only get what they may take by giving. I live my latter days giving my life to what some might call subsistence farming. But to subsist is to manage to live. It is to maintain oneself and others.

A home farmer cannot have a pet mentality. Pets, by their nature, are friendly toward us for the easy life we give them. This can extend to the mentality of modern living, that we should be treated like pets. A pet is a Passive Entitled Taker. Now, pet projects aside, and putting aside how much I love to pet my pets, life can never be full on the take, but requires give-and-take, even in old age. The woeful truth about how we treat our elderly is hidden in why they take what we give.

I can think of no more perfect poem about give-and-take than a garden or, better, a farm. To have the nobility of being able to grow our own food is something I heartily give my old age to know. And, rather like the seasons of the farm, I turn doing much of the same thing every day into a procession of life getting to know itself. I have found the great fortune of being planted with a farm. I find I only have to give daily attention and effort to tending this small plot of life, and I am rewarded with all the sustenance I need.

Earlier I described my daily patterns of care for our home farm. There is a broader cloth of care that covers over weeks and months and the years. Upon that cloth are embroidered familiar patterns that bring memories as readily as they bring reminders of what to expect.

I know the ewes will come into heat in late summer and my ram will be cool with that. And lambs will come when winter is sloshed and spring wakes up. About the spring equinox, the goats will kid and I will milk again by May. New chicks, and ducklings, and turkey poults in spring make me feel like a spring chicken over and over easy again. Seeds are sourced, manure is spread, gardens are forked. Seeds become sprouts, sprouts start to spread, and the garden is a garden again. And summer will wane. Lambs go to freezers, chickens to roasters. The farm kitchen steams with activity and our larders are filled with longevity. In winter I draw pictures and write of this life.

When the new lamb, Columb, died, there was a tear in the fabric. Yet the cloth remains whole. When, at the start of our home farming, the mink slaughtered our flock of chickens, I knew the routine would never be the same. When the rats wiped out a year's worth of tomatoes, I remembered the sweet juicy beauties we had grown before, and I tasted the tomatoes we would grow again. And, the fabric's edge frayed when I drove Leslie Anne to the emergency room in the middle of the night.

I awoke to a mournful moaning I'd never heard before. I found Leslie doubled over near the bed, not able to utter much more than these groans of pain. It might as well have been an encounter with death of the worst kind. We don't think acutely about our general health until something specifically untoward happens.

Leslie had suffered an acute attack of pancreatitis. Her doctors were unable to say what may have caused the condition, as Leslie met none of the profiles for pancreatitis to occur. I have only to understand that my wife's pain was life-changing.

Her intentional change was to remove from her diet any and all possible culprits that could instigate any chance of future pancreatitis attacks. She stopped drinking any alcoholic beverages and stopped eating any fatty foods. We were both already unlikely to eat many processed foods, especially junk foods or fast foods. We cooked our meals already from whole ingredients. Many of our meals, as described earlier, were grown ourselves here on Croft Farm. I wanted to support Leslie Anne's changes, but she never asked nor expected me to have the same diet.

What that has meant in terms of the food we produce on Croft Farm is that Leslie no longer consumes any of our dairy products. She never did much before. I indicated that she didn't like the taste of the goat's milk. She'd said she did like it 'if it was fresh', but I found that 'fresh' for her meant within a couple hours, at most, of milking. She had enjoyed chevre, but not the goat milk yogurt I made. The yogurt was not as solid as the store-bought "Greek Style" she liked. I tried straining the yogurt like I'd read was done to achieve thicker yogurt, but my goat yogurt passed through the cheesecloth pretty much as it had entered. I tried adding dry milk solids, as manufacturers do, but that took more dry milk than goat milk. At the time of Leslie Anne's health scare I had just begun to successfully make hard cheeses. She absolutely loved these.

In fact, she had once boasted about it to friends with whom she was sharing some of a cheese I'd made, calling it the 'champagne of cheeses'. One of the tasters said the taste was lovely, but had not heard Leslie Anne's descriptive appellation before. "What," said Leslie. "You mean 'champagne of cheeses'?"

"Oh" the friend replied. "I thought you'd said 'champagne of Jesus'."

Though I had begun to try my hand at winemaking and brewing, I would not be doing so for Leslie Anne, even if it were the champagne of Jesus. There was a fairly long period in my life when I did not drink alcohol at all. It was an occupational hazard when I was an addictions treatment professional. The only problem I ever really had with alcohol was working with people for whom it was evil. By

the time I'd met Leslie Anne, we were both social drinkers who shared drinks, too, in our society of two. I certainly have seen the ravages of alcohol, and especially of alcoholism, in others. I understand Leslie's fear for her own health.

It is common for me to have a glass of cider or beer after the afternoon feedings. I might have a second glass with Leslie when she comes home from work. She has discovered non-alcoholic beer. It is soon to be the only beer we buy. I will continue to brew my own beer, the supplies much less expensive than brewery-made beers. And, when I have the fruit, I will make cider and wine. We have also both begun drinking apple cider vinegar. Leslie Anne had discovered that this, usually in a prepared beverage, was just the thing to relieve joint aches. Now we don't have to ache as much jointly.

Leslie continues to enjoy eating our lamb, and chicken, and pork. She avoids the sausages and bacon, and we trim visible fat from the meat we enjoy. While her overall dietary changes are quite significant, it has not actually meant much in the way of changes to the way we eat in general, nor to the food we raise on Croft Farm. This underscores how present-day health problems, while largely dietary, are not food problems, per se. It is apparently only a food issue in the sense that we ingest, as supermarket and fast food, so many things that are not food.

Leslie Anne and I may never learn what caused her attack of pancreatitis. The changes to her eating have certainly been meaningful insofar as her blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and weight control are all level now. I've never had any serious health scares for myself, or even indicators, to suggest much need to change any of my diet. I did have a weakness for chocolate. That has led to waking in the middle of the night, with or without nightmares. I just try to eat my chocolate earlier in the day and save my nights for full sleep and sweet dreams. Leslie Anne likes to give me chocolates (and good dreams), and she continues to make them for me.

At every chance she gets, Leslie is out working in the cottage garden outside our front window. I, of course, am out in the other parts of the farm everyday. There is a paradox unfolding in our lives: the more we repeat these things we do, the more we see things change. Perhaps the idea of routine work revealing changes seems not paradoxical in the least. The story of humanity is that we sur-

vive to continue to survive. The paradox may be in the question of whether the things we change really change things, or change us.

For the farmer, changes are best made in accord with, and upon the advice of, natural changes. This includes any changes that happen seasonally, and to seasons. Too little or too much precipitation can be just as destructive as too little or too much heat. As the climate changes, the seasons change, the extremes change. In such a world, is it so extreme to think to grow some or all of one's own food?

I like that we use the word season to name the weather divisions and growing cycle of the year and to use the word to also name how we enhance the flavours of our food. I like to think of myself and my food as both well-seasoned. The varied uses of the same word are no accident. The word season first referred to the sowing of seed. In fact all three words – season, sowing, and seed – are from the same root meaning (pun happily intended). The good weather and, therefore good food, could only be assured if we knew when to sow seeds. The idea of seasoning our food is from the observation that fruit tasted better when ripened. Hence, to make food taste better, which in its raw state may be less than palatable, we season it.

The first reason for the seasons of the year was food, being we are the ones who reason. I suspect that seasoning our food may have been the path to extending our food supply, which extended our populations and extended our seasons, to the extent we find ourselves in. When food is in short supply, as it necessarily is with present day populations, food has to be added to (supply has to be supplemented) so that it can feed the greatest numbers. The preservative, nutritive, attractive, and palliative additives ensure that materials can serve as food for more people longer. Quantity of life is a sadly poor measure of the quality of life.

It might be that, by and large, the world's population has gotten too sick and too tired to be sick and tired of living this way. For many, to advocate growing healthy food is to ignore the plight of feeding the world. I wanted to change the world when I was young and naïve. Now I want to change the world because I am older and wiser. I learned, when I taught organizational change management, that the first and consistent ingredient needed to assure sustainable change is what John Kotter called a sense of urgency.

Kotter and I are not talking about the pressure of deadlines or other demands. In old age, a sense of urgency is much more than the urge to urinate. In organizations, in societies, in civilizations, as well as in old age, the greatest sense of urgency comes from the growing probability of death. Those who have no sense of death only have a sense of urgency when they sense their own death approaching.

With a sense of urgency, resources, ideas, and opportunities become clear. For Leslie Anne and me, while we have no children together, it was clear that our lives drew us to create good and to further life. Providence has meant that we have received the means to give ourselves a good life rich in resourcefulness. Home farming is a change we made to change how we might, even more, conserve the limitations of money. It may be our last way to conserve a little bit of earth for the world we will leave. I have a greater sense of urgency about the dying of the earth than I do of my own death.

But, am I, are we, as home farmers, changing anything? Home farming has certainly changed the way Leslie Anne and I eat. It has changed the way I live my days. It has changed my commute to work. It has changed my wardrobe. But, enough about me: does home farming change the world?

I am of the absolute belief that most every person can grow something to eat. Moreover, I believe that each person could grow enough of something to eat with someone else. I believe others like me can grow enough food to store for other times in the year. I believe that some of us, at times, can grow enough to share with friends and neighbours. Some of us can grow enough food consistently to become market farmers and community-supported agriculture. Beyond that, I'm not sure what we can do without jeopardizing our soil, our air, and our water. But, I tend to be small-minded in that way.

As my employment career was spent trying to counsel, educate, and consult against urban social ills, and as I have supported broader social causes and stood and marched to support or decry many a global concern, my sense now is that local is the only global power most have. And, I've found when I'm kneeling on the ground, with my hands in the dirt, I'm as close as I'm going to ever get to a global

experience. Humanity would not have continued this long had not enough of us grown our own food. A supermarket world is not sustainable.

As boredom can be understood as a feeling of meaningless slowness in what one is doing, happiness might be thought of experiencing meaningful movement, of having something to do. I am happy to know that, as a farmer, I always have something to do. I may not be always happy about it, but I am always happy to have done it. Happiness would never survive as only a state of mind. To be happy is to recognize movement in lives and be moved by it, to make our next move. I used to pursue happiness. Whole cultures are built upon the principles like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These so-thought inalienable rights are equally able to alienate us – from our own life and others' liberty – and when happiness is *only* experienced in pursuit.

Life seems to have to be boring in order for us to appreciate what our routines and repetitions allow us to experience as new, things that make us happy. A poor substitute has been the purchasing of new things. When things no longer do what they have done for us they probably should be replaced. But, should things be replaced out of boredom? Should they necessarily be replaced with other things? Is new better enough to just make us feel better? I can assure you, in many senses, what I do everyday, and have to do everyday, could be boring if I considered it as slow, painstaking, and repetitive – all of which it is. What makes my life not the least boring is that I have this to do, that I see meaningful movement in my movements.

Sameness is not the enemy. The enemy we need to stay at bay is the notion that doing something different is change. New is not the same as better. Actual change means that we act differently. So, while I am wont to talk on at times about the world food crises, what is critical is what I do to feed myself.

Some have a lot more, and bigger, ideas to change the world. I have only enough time left to change with the seasons.



# Passing On

As far as I know, my family hasn't grown its own food for at least three generations. My paternal grandparents never had a garden. Their parents immigrated to find the employment they couldn't find in Ireland, Wales, or England. My maternal grandparents, too, immigrated to North America not to farm, but for city jobs. I have no indications that the last generations of my family in Europe were growing any food, let alone farming. I am somewhat heartened by my own children's attention to what they eat, though they, too, grow very little of their own food, and to do so, now, does not seem their concern.

But, if I am repeating myself, I must: farming costs money. If this lifestyle I describe hearkens to a time before money, it is my intention. In a market economy money affords the opportunities to buy all sorts of things, even farms. The farm home is, by design, intended to bypass the market wherever and whenever possible. Farm homes get to pass on buying eggs, for example. Surplus eggs that are sold insert the home farmer into the market economy, but just deep enough to buy chicken feed. What I spend in chicken feed is chicken feed when compared with what we'd spend on eggs and chicken at the supermarket.

My dentist, though, will not take eggs or chickens in payment for my dental care (not that I've asked). Then again, not having to buy eggs or chicken probably goes somewhat toward having other money to pay for the dentist. However meager monetary income may be from farming, it is earned from surplus food, food remaining after the food we didn't buy at the supermarket. Sadly, modern-day commercial farmers are selling not only surpluses, but even selling what could be their own food, buying from supermarkets, selling their lives.

The esteemed French historian, Fernand Braudel, in his book *The Structures of Everyday Life*, a world history of domestic life in the advancing of civilisation and of capitalism from the 15th through 18th centuries, includes this passage, which I excerpt in full:

*“Although it is an ancient fact of life, or rather an ancient technique, money has never ceased to surprise humanity. It seems mysterious and disturbing. In the first place, it must have seemed complicated in itself, for the monetary economy that goes with money was nowhere fully developed, even in a country like France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or indeed in the eighteenth. It only made its way into certain regions and certain sectors, and continued to disturb the others. It was a novelty more because of what it brought with it than what it was itself. What did it actually bring? Sharp variations in the prices of essential foodstuffs; incomprehensible relationships in which man no longer recognized either himself, his customs, or his ancient values. His work became a commodity, himself a ‘thing’”.*

*The words Noel du Fail put into the mouths of Breton peasants (1548) expressed their astonishment and confusion. If there was so much less abundance inside peasant homes, it was because:*

*Chickens and goslings are hardly allowed to come to perfection before they are taken to sell [to the town market, of course] for money to be given either to the lawyer or the doctor (people [formerly] almost unknown), to the one in return for dealing harshly with his neighbour, disinheriting him, having him put in prison; to the other for curing him of a fever, ordering him to be bled (which I have never tried) or for a clyster; all of which our late Tiphaine La Bloye of fond memory [a bone setter] cured, without so much mumbling, fumbling, and antidotes, and almost for a Paternoster.*

*But now they have ‘transferred from the towns to our villages’ those spices and sweetmeats ranging from pepper to ‘sugar-coated leeks’ quite ‘unknown’ to our predecessors and harmful to man’s body, ‘without which, however, in this century, a banquet is tasteless, ill-arranged and graceless’. “Upon my word,” replies one of the listeners, ‘you speak true, my friend, and it seems to me I am in a new world.’”*

*A bemused comment perhaps, but a revealing one, and similar reactions might have been found all over Europe.*

*For the same process can be observed everywhere: any society based on an ancient structure which opens its doors to money sooner or later loses its acquired equilibria and liberates forces that can never afterwards be adequately controlled. The new form of interchange disturbs the old order, benefits a few privileged individuals and hurts everyone else.”*

That Braudel could speak for more of us. While bartering will always continue, and is the foundation of all trade, it is not publicized in the general culture. In the 1970s, and since, barter fairs were held as counter-culture gatherings. I have continued to barter where possible, amongst friends and neighbours. I gave my neighbour John a turkey in exchange for tractoring out that sheep manure that had built up. I believe I shared how we traded lamb for salmon. I also bartered with a neighbour to trade a lamb for a cord of wood. I paid a fellow who dug fencepost holes for me a bottle of whiskey. In some of these cases, bartering was suggested over a money exchange; in others no payment was actually requested. In any case, I was looking for a way other than money to make a payment.

It may surprise to learn that the word pay is related to the word peace. The idea is that a payment is a means to ‘appease, pacify, satisfy’ another. Hence, we pay for shoes and we pay for sins, and we are paid for employment we may not like. The word wasn’t used to refer to money until the late 14th century. For more than thirty generations before us, however, we mostly think of payments as monetary. We have had no real peace from the need for paycheques.

To be a home farmer requires enough resourcefulness that bartering, especially in a rural economy, is one means to limit exclusive reliance on money. Another means, more likely and more sure, is to limit need for money, especially money you don’t have, to use the money you do have to pay for things that will lessen the need for money.

This includes the tools needed for home farming. If you restrict your aspirations to feeding your own household, it is very possible that you will only need hand tools. It is essential, nonetheless, that you pay for good tools, even when you find what may look like the same tool, but be cheaper. The home farmer is frugal, but not cheap.

Monetary investments include the price of land and structures, and of livestock and seeds, to start. Afterwards, it is possible to save seeds and breed your own livestock for replacement stock. Similarly, there will be some money needed to outfit and maintain the farm home, as a farm home. This includes not only building and maintaining animal pens and shelters, but also storage needs and kitchen requirements.

The greatest financial savings, of course, will depend on how much of the work of building and maintaining a farm home is done by the home farmer. While we need physical help as we age, much labour can be provided by oneself, provided the home farmer knows how to slow down, and when to ask for help. In rural areas, when trades people are needed, it is not yet unusual for them to work with the homeowner, in some cases. Even if I do not work with a particular trades person, I do pay attention and ask questions, so that I might, in the future, be able to do repairs and renovations myself.

Other farmers, even other new farmers, are sources of help, too. Practical information and advice can be a useful currency. These are skilled people who often like to share what they have learned, ways they do things, and novel solutions. It was Jaki and Karen, ‘the goat ladies’, who not only taught me how to milk goats but also simple medical treatments for goats – cedar branches or baking soda for stomach upsets, sunflower seeds to recover weight loss, and so on. Gavin, the poultry breeder, has given me as much or more information on poultry than my intensive reading has. My friend, Phil, has helped me with many a construction quandary.

If used judiciously, do remember to play your old person and beginner cards. These cards are valid as long as you continue to help others. The older you get, the more beginners there are to help. But to be honest, as a home farmer, I expect to be old and always beginning the rest of my life.

I haven’t talked with my own children, yet, about their possible desire to continue Croft Farm. I know that this small plot of land was once farmland, and then it wasn’t, but now it is. While I won’t be around to know, I like the prospect that life would continue on Croft Farm, as a farm. But I’m equally okay with the forest

returning. I suppose my only fear for the place is that no life of the soil would continue here.

The cottage at Croft Farm we have built, is intended as not merely highway lodging, but as a farmstay. We are hopeful of guests who would share the curiosity for growing one's own food. It is, however, neither a place where guests are expected to work, nor an amusement park. It will be an intentional getaway; guests would be looking to experience home farm life. We will be happy to show and tell our experience.

When time comes, as it seems it must, that we are no longer able to do home farming, I would wish that we could continue to live here. If I'm going to continue to live in reasonable control of my faculties, that would mean that someone else would continue the farming aspect of the home. We have thought that the cottage, too, might aid in that transition. Either the cottage becomes a bothy for farm labourers, or Leslie Anne and I move into the cottage and avail our three-bedroom house for a younger family who wants to have a farm home.

The administrative details of such arrangements, legal and financial considerations, and the affectionate bond we need to have with whomever this might be, are all incidental to passing on the heritage of growing one's own food. (Parties interested in Croft Farm need not apply until the latter half of the 21st century.)

In the namesake of Croft Farm are the many subsistence farms that were and are. Maybe people cannot really earn a living from farming; we can still, in home farming, make living real.

We are just passing our seventh year on Croft Farm. I don't know what to expect for the rest of my life. I have come to know what I don't want. I wouldn't have started farming at this age if not thinking it was both a good way to live and a good way to die. I do know that I no longer sow seeds in classrooms, cultivate relationships in boardrooms, or nurture lives in a therapist's chair. In these roles, I did get to know the bad reputations of sheep, goats, and chickens in human clothing, and I saw predators and prey behaving as these do. Much of this employment bore good fruit; the rest became manure. All has helped me to find the good life in

home farming. Knowing the turning of the seasons on this farm is showing a good death.

In the meantime, before I completely merge with earth, I prepare and am prepared for life and death. I fear most of us are not prepared for either very well. While I fear for lean times, I am both saddened and heartened by the more likely coming mean times. The centre cannot hold. The disparities of wealth and resources foment discord and division that collude to collide.

In the meantime, we have a place of earth and the capacity of life to help feed a few others and ourselves.

In the mean times, we will grow above average food in above average quantity.

In the mean times, I will not be a mean old man.

There is a frog in my pocket still.