

Young farmer comment solicitation form.

Background:

We are currently making a documentary film about young farmers, and have already filmed quite a bit, and begun formulating the major themes of the film. But the larger goal of the film project is to invite young farmers themselves to articulate which issues are important, and which avenues (political, economic) we ought to explore in the future.

Green, or inexperienced, we may be, but I doubt any of you would consider yourselves meek, and it becomes ever clearer that we will be the inheritors of the sustainable food movement.

Which solutions do you see emerging in the context of your local food economy? Have you heard of innovative land-tenure arrangements that you'd like to hold up as examples, can you imagine useful legislation that we might craft to support the entry of new-optimists/ecologists into the small farm sector? How can we entice more folks into a productive, rural livelihood?

Below, you'll find a few 'trigger questions' to inspire your comments, but please don't limit your insights to the questions, or even to this page. If you feel moved, please begin a protracted brainstorm about "who we are" as a young farming demographic, "what we can promise" society at large, and "how the public can support us." Like John Jeavons says: First, "grow food" then "grow soil" then "grow people who do both."

Land - Did you borrow, beg or steal your land? Is there a future in land trusts, informal 'lending' by larger land-lords, land grants from municipalities, churches, schools, and state agencies? Could you imagine grants programs that 'matched' the cost of ecosystem improvements on working farms (such as planting hedgerows/riparian buffers) or which helped new farmers purchase processing equipment? Can you imagine other creative ways for young farmers to get access to the land that they need?

Education - In the Central Coast region we are lucky enough to have the UCSC program in Santa Cruz, and indeed the alums of that fine Agro-Ecology Department have largely pioneered the organic movement in California. Imagine if we had a similar practicum-based department at every land-grant university, and that public-funded research focused on bio-remediation, fertility studies, and pest management. Could you imagine other useful programs? Conversion assistance, ecosystem services incentive programs/ extension materials, organic farming research. Articulate your vision for the re-education of America's farmers.

Support - Beyond market-demand, and political credibility, young farmers, and farmers in general could use some support. That might mean better news coverage of our perspectives, and occasionally our plight. That might mean higher enrollment of urban youth in 'agricultural camps' and 'city farms', or an increase in apprenticeships, internships and 'holiday farming.' How else could we communicate the importance of farming, and the reality of farming to city folks, policy makers, and potentially recruit-able youngsters?

Markets - The scale of our natural foods distribution system in this country is often at odds with the scale feasible for family-based organic farming. The loading dock at Whole Foods is just too high up for your average Toyota Pickup. Furthermore, mega-chains have little shelf space or patience for the needs and vagaries of local growers. What are our options beyond CSA, Farmers Markets and the occasional Whole Foods or Mom+Pop Grocery? Can we imagine cooperative farm-sales models, or collaborative distribution networks, farm stands on interstate highways, veggie-depots at public schools. Do we see a future in institutional partnerships with schools, universities, hospitals, city governments or even corporations? What is your ideal market situation, a town square, a gourmet shop, the people come and pick the damn vegetables themselves?

Life - What is so attractive and compelling about being a farmer? Is it the rock-star status? The fantastic health care? The babes? Those strong muscular men? The food? The sunshine? The smell of cow manure in the air? Please take this space to flesh out your own personal motivations, delights and principles that guided your career choice. Please also take a moment to explain the limitations, drawbacks (slow internet, no local live music, lack of a social life, work of farming). These are important things to include in our transmission and we don't want to forget anything.

Future - What do you think is useful about a society that has many young farmers in it. Do you think that we, as a demographic, have some special potency in a 'lower energy economy' that has so far been overlooked? What is the tangible benefit to consumers, citizens and communities? Just last week I learned that the FDA has ruled in favor of 'cloned' animal products, safe to eat Dolly! What would you say about our vision for agriculture's future in this country vis-a-vis this dismal foreshadowing of a bio-tech, nano-tech, genetically homogenized monoculture? Please voice your objections, and the alternative you see.

Nominate - Yes. We'd like to film every young farmer in the country. Unfortunately, that might make for a marathon-length film. What we are doing, however, is constructing a massive 'young farmer database' to register all these efforts and map them across the country, allowing for networking, 'young farmer friendly' provisioning by forward-thinking restaurants, to help folks generate local media, and for future uses as yet unimaginable. So please include contact information and as much relevant detail as you wish about your favorite farming colleagues. It's also easy to nominate online at our website. www.thegreenhorns.net/nominate

Thank you for your work, for your insights, and for being a part of the future that will feed this country. Stay in touch.

Please email comments to farmer@thegreenhorns.net