

Young Urban Farmers Provide Reasons To Believe There Is A Future In Agriculture

MAY, Idaho: I have been going to conferences for over 30 years now encompassing a wide variety of topics, mostly related to agriculture, resource, or food.

Of course, if we are serious about eating healthy food, then we must also be serious about resources and agriculture. And if we are serious about agriculture,

then we must be serious about food.

And if we don't take care of all of our resources we will have even greater food issues than we have now. It is all so interrelated we really cannot separate issues of food, agriculture, and natural resources.

A lot of you know Dawn and I are

"Hands down, this is the best investment we ever made in our business."
 Clint Olson, Oklahoma

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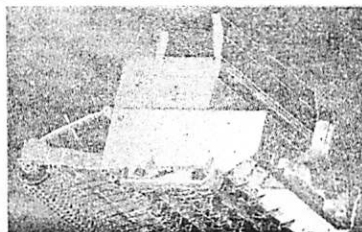
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foodies on this end of the thread and many of you also know we are strongly involved in the alternative ag and food sector. I don't get to go to many conferences that involve serious natural resource management, alternative agriculture themes, and the Real Food movement all in one place. That's where we went last November.

The venue was the Quivira Coalition's 10th Annual Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It easily ranks in the top five conferences I have attended over the last 32 years. It gives me reason to believe in the future of farming and ranching, food vs. commodities, and the youth of America. For more information, check out their website at www.quiviracoalition.org and look at the program from the 2011 Annual Conference.

I opened the conference with a one-day workshop with the theme of "Ranching in the 21st Century" attended by 270 people, about half of whom were under 30 years of age, which is pretty unusual for an ag conference these days. Most of them didn't look like your typical farm kids. While that might seem unremarkable to some of you, put it in this context.

The average age of farmers and ranchers in the USA is 58 while the average age of beef producers is 63. We are not a healthy industry. After years of farm and ranch parents telling their kids to go to town and get a job, we are about out of the chance for the next generation returning to the farm or ranch.

But into the fray step a bunch of enthusiastic punk urban farmers and ranchers. I got a lot of thank you's from many of them for my recent columns in SGF discussing appropriate education for beginning farmers and ranchers. I had advocated a basic liberal arts edu-

cation and that is from where most of this group has come. These guys and gals are coming from a different background than young people who grew up on farms and ranches.

Visit this website for exciting information on this movement: www.thegreenhorns.net <http://www.thegreenhorns.net/>. There are over 7,000 young farmers and ranchers in this group which has only existed for about four years. If they had told me this group had 700 members, I would have been impressed.

This is the Facebook, Twitter, and other social media farming movement. They have barn raisings, tree plantings, chicken killings, and all kinds of other old fashioned community farming activities called together across cyberspace just like the hoods in big cities call together spontaneous riots.

They are involved in everything from rooftop gardens in big cities (<http://rooftopfarms.org/>) to going back to the country and living with Grandma or Aunt Irene and taking over the family farm (<http://www.masumoto.com/>). From a Vietnamese college student fighting for food justice to city kids doing on-farm butchering, it was an inspirational group.

What makes me even more excited for the future of pasture-based farming is almost none of them are vegetarians. As Severine von Tschaner Fleming, founder of the Greenhorns, said in her presentation, "Nothing is sexier than a hot young man butchering a hog."

Maybe not her exact words, but the meaning was clear.

These young people are up to their elbows in working with the land and livestock and they're excited about it. Severine's presen-

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FEATHERMAN EQUIPMENT

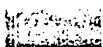
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Grassroots

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lation at Quivira may have been the best I have ever seen at any conference anywhere in the world.

One after another, these young people got up and told their stories and presented their visions for the future of American agriculture. It's not one a lot of people in mainstream agriculture have seen or heard before. Farm Bureau and NCBA might not like it, but those organizations are not providing the regeneration of agriculture and the repopulating of rural areas. We need new blood in this industry and here is an opportunity for ag revitalization.

Too many of my generation (the over 55 crowd) believe kids today are lazy, selfish, and all they want to do is play video games and watch TV. What I heard from these kids is they are tired of convenience, having everything easy, and no interface with the real world. They are not afraid to get their hands dirty, but they are also not interested in a subsistence existence.

This is not the "back to earth" movement of the 1960s and 70s. I saw enough of that earlier movement to know this is something completely different. They want to make a good living off the land, not just survive. They are into product development and diversification, aggressive marketing, and a very capitalistic approach to farming, but with social justice as a core belief.

As a result of the three days we spent with this group, Dawn and I got fully recharged and inspired to continue to run the good race and fight the good fight. I finally have reason to believe the future of American agriculture is a little brighter than I thought it might be. We're already planning to see them again next year. Maybe you should do likewise.

Real food from real people. We love it and encourage you to visit some of the links I have listed. ■

Jim Gerrish offers consulting, design and turn-key construction for MiG projects nationwide. He can be reached at jrgerrish@custertel.net. His books are available on page 18.

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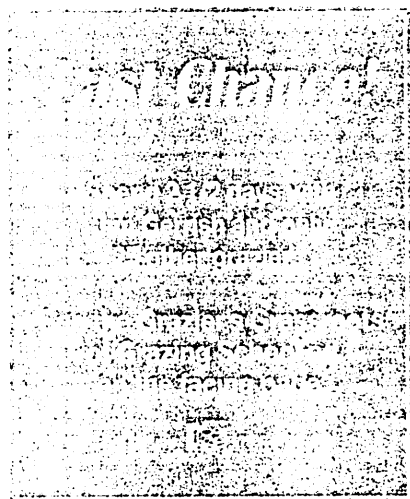
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