Beyond Agriculture
Beyond Agriculture

As with many of you, I too have become seduced with the hope of civilization’s collapse. The primitivist critiques of our present situation have been clear and powerful. The road between theory and practice can lead down many paths. This paper hopes to show some of the environmental, social, and political ramifications of our daily food consuming activities; in particular, how these activities relate to agriculture and alternatives to it.

After working in agriculture for many years, I would have to agree with many of the critiques leveled against it. It is usually unsustainable. Don’t believe the hype, Sustainable agriculture rarely ever exists. It is impossible to take from a space year after year without replenishing the soil. Chemical farms don’t worry about soil health, quickly destroying it, which fosters further chemical dependence. Organic farms replenish the soil, but where does the material, used to replenish, come from? More often than not, Factoy farm or traveler leftovers are used on certified organic farms (Sorry Vegans). Factory farm animals are usually fed chemically grown food because there just isn’t enough animal product fertilizer to go around. Most organic farms are not sustainable because they import their nutrients and biomass from elsewhere. This usually takes fossil fuels, which are also used to run machinery on most farms. Progressive farmers point out that a percentage of fossil fuels could be replaced with ‘sustainably produced’ fuels. Many of these, like biodiesel, rely on even more agriculture for production. Since alternative fuels will theoretically be implemented sometime in the undetermined future, they become the perfect excuse to continue fuel consumption in the present.
The abuses of words like sustainable and organic will likely only worsen, considering the corporate buyout of large organic companies.

Although it is hard to grow demanding (nutrient and water) annuals without unsustainable practices, sustainable examples of annual production exist. Gardening or small-scale farming can use homemade composts and composted human manure. The Chinese developed a sustainable civilization by integrating human waste back into the system. The Amish continue a somewhat sustainable pre-fossil fuel system that requires a low population density and much hard work. Bio-intensive gardening has substituted labor for outside inputs and space. It has the advantage of being able to support a fairly dense populace, but also requires heavy labor. Masanobu Fukuoka has achieved higher than average yields without outside inputs, using a complex minimal labor system particular to his site. He encourages living in a mud hut with very little technology in order to develop a system suited to your own location. Few have taken him up on that. His rants against scientific farming and mechanization along with his anti-work "Do-Nothing" philosophy are quite inspiring.

But even if the whole world grew food in these idyllic manners, it would totally fail to be biologically equal to the ecosystem it replaced and would provide little habitat for that which is wild. How many eagles live in the strawberry field? Seen any bobcats in the garden recently? You cannot purchase a solution to this problem.

Basically, if you are buying conventional food (organic or not), you are indirectly supporting the eradication or suppression of the wild. I should remind the reader that if they must consume domesticated food, a plant based diet is less destructive than a meat-based one and a dumpster-based diet beats all.

A hunter-gatherer food system, on the other hand, can be completely compatible with the environment and can, in some areas, provide an abundance of food. For this to be an option in a native ecosystem, property lines cannot exist because travel between different regions is necessary. There has been a reduction in the number, diversity, and availability of these important regions. Much once productive land has been degraded to the point that rehabilitation could take hundreds or thousands of years. In many areas, agricultural yields are now decreasing despite massive outside inputs. At this point much of the current population is built precariously on the carbon credits nature issued us. That said, I doubt that a return to primitive existence without a transition period would be possible.

I wondered if there was a way to produce more food per square foot than conventional agriculture, and also meet the ecological criteria of a hunter gatherer food system. I looked for nexus points between the worlds that would be applicable to a broad portion of the population.

Monoculture attempts to make the environment fit into the economic system by producing a high yield of one item out of a given space. Scientific studies show that increased yield for a single crop can be achieved by excluding other plants. This pits the farmer against anything competing with their production of this one crop. This system is designed to export produce in a global economy among other things. Monocultures have varying degrees of severity ranging from diversified small-scale annual farming to massive industrial operations.

Polyculture, on the other hand, attempts to produce a small individual amount of many items. Polycultures are exemplified by many species (sometimes hundreds) sharing the sun and soil at the same time.
Traditional polycultures have usually been (sub)tropical. The massive diversity of genetic material currently available makes polycultures a viable option for almost any ecosystem.

Studies have often shown that polycultures can produce far more total yield per square foot than monocultures. Some traditional indigenous polycultures have contained more diversity than the surrounding native forest. Experiments in Europe and America have shown that adding nut trees to grain fields will decrease grain yields but can increase total yields by up to 50%. From a strictly economic standpoint, monocultures are superior due to their simplicity. From a personal and communal use standpoint, polycultures offer far more subsistence.

Native American cultures practiced some annual gardening in many places. Usually, the scale and style of this annual cultivation did not resemble modern agriculture. Many tribes used annual production to supplement their gathered foodstuffs, while others were more dependent on this type of production. Each tribe evolved a system based on its knowledge, native genetic stock, and the local ecosystem. In areas lacking natural richness or having extreme temperatures, spring and summer gardening can replace gathering.

West Coast tribes practiced a modified gatherer system in which native wild plants were managed to the people's advantage with burning, non-destructive harvesting, and other sophisticated techniques. The indigenous project has much to teach, but Nature provides an ever-changing collage of landscapes and cultures. Exact imitation would reduce our potential routes away from civilization to those routes that existed prior to civilization.

Agroforestry attempts to solve some of the ecological problems associated with monocultures. Many crops are grown in the same space,
although far less than in a traditional polyculture. Crops are chosen and organized for an efficient harvest and maximum marketability, usually in the niche market industry. Agroforestry, while being an important step, still exists in a surplus capitalist paradigm. Agroforestry offers much valuable research into many crops and their use in a polycultural setting.

Permaculture is an all encompassing lifestyle that integrates many ecological principles, including polyculture and agroforestry, into its food production system. It relies heavily on human management and stresses making natural connections to increase efficiency. Overly managed systems can, as demonstrated by the European Project, result in organized time, less personal freedom, and an increased workload. These problems can become even more acute when domestic animals are included. Some elaborate designs even include fences (that need to be maintained) running everywhere to help manage the animals. Overall, however, permaculture has much to offer and is an accurate academic blueprint of natural cycles and humans’ relationship to them. It is also very worthy for its technical information and inspiration.

Since I live in the Pacific NW, I have focused my research on food systems similar to that of the local Natives. My interest in the primitive has broadened my scope to include all non-agricultural peoples living (pre) historically in all similar climates. My hatred of global capital and civilization has also informed my research. I would describe most of the following tactics as modified gatherer food systems, forest gardening, or paradise gardening.

One principle is reliance on wild and feral plants. Much of the breeding and domestication of plants has (once again!) been done to fit the economic system. Most breeding has been for appearance and saleability (increased size and water content), “better” taste (sugar
content), and storage/transport issues (shelf life and reduced handling damage). Many characteristics, which were unknown or ignored have been lost in the inevitable trade-off. Domestic plants have fewer vitamins and minerals, less protein, and lower anti-oxidant activity than their wild relatives. Most have less structural integrity (fruit splits, grain lodges) and are more disease-prone than their wild counterparts. Some annuals used to be perennial before that was traded for higher annual yield. Many highly bred plants have had their ability to compete in the ecosystem so reduced as to be totally dependent on outside inputs. These inputs include fences, greenhouses, fertilizers, sprays, tractors and soil cultivation devices. Genetic engineering, the (un)natural extension of this breeding, will only amplify these problems. It should be noted that current non-commercial breeding focuses on vastly different results including increased hardiness, more vigor, and higher nutrition. Some unconscious breeding is going to happen through picking (selection), consumption, and planting (shitting). Wild plants have a much higher nutrition so the amount of calories produced in a given space is not the only criteria for a food system's superiority.

A wild plant diet relies on a greater diversity of plants to provide adequate nutrition rather than obsessing about soil health. Of course many nutrient depleted soils occur in the city, which already lacks public spaces that are not highly trafficked, disturbed, or possibly polluted. Even with these obstacles, fresh, nutrient rich wild plants may well compete health-wise with domesticated vegetables acquired from the supermarket after sitting for days. Convincing the population that domesticated vegetables was the only healthy food available, would be financially advantageous to somebody. And,
convincing gardeners that they need products to grow their own vegetables has certainly been.

Wild/herbaceous or aggressive reseeding annuals can reproduce by themselves, completely eliminating the labor of saving seeds. They can hold their own alongside natives (not always a good thing!). Once the plants have been collected or purchased, they intersect very little with capital. A knowledge of edible weeds and native plants allow the land less a free food source. Wild [unk] plants require little specialization to grow and can be a challenge to a highly cultured pallet. They, therefore, are highly resistant to commodification.

Another feature of modified gatherer food systems and forest gardening is mimicking the natural environment wherever you are. Here (a forest), this involves using plants of different sizes (trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs) in the same space. Since private property limits movement, system designers should draw from the wide variety of edible and useful plants available for their conditions and space. The world contains literally thousands of edible plant species of plants. Obtain and experiment with different species and varieties now, while civilization is still operating. Since past cultures have largely been designed around the available genetic material, post-collapse cultures will also be limited largely, by the available material. Once established, perennials and trees require little care. A knowledge of useful and edible landscape plants can turn even an urban area into a foragers delight. "Weeds" (plants whose use is not yet discovered) will indicate niches in an ecosystem that can be utilized. A well-developed polyculture should appear to the layman as a chaotic jumble. Calendars will be of little use as natural events start to interconnect and create a different style of "time." Instruction can reveal detailed plant processing techniques, but very little can be learned in the classroom. It is the one size fits all textbook agriculture that has spread like blight over the once pristine land. Each site must have a personal relationship with its users. Most of what you learn pertains specifically to your space and therefore remains uncharted. With the sophisticated knowledge needed to fully utilize everything and the lack of straight lines, a complex polyculture is highly resistant to slave labor and mechanization.

Certainly many of the ideas expressed thus far imply some sort of management. They are generally resistant to the worst ravages of capitalism. They provide viable options to genetic engineering in the hope of keeping the growing population fed and at the same time navigate us into the future minus the doomsday scenario. The "mass die off" proponents have a simple theory that allows them to avoid changing their daily habits while focusing more on negation. This could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It has been espoused that agriculture led to an increase in food supply and therefore an increase in population. Using this logic, genetic engineering would seem to be the next step of human manipulation needed to feed everyone. A vast body of information contradicts the simplified assumptions. Virtually all wild food books praise the common cattail, for example, which grows all over Europe and North America. It can yield far more starch (among other things) per square foot than potatoes and was growing en-masse before the wetlands were drained (to grow potatoes). Studies of traditional polycultures, small-scale farming, gardening, permaculture, and agroforestry show a far greater yield per square foot than ecologically and nutritionally inefficient, industrial agriculture. The social, political, and economic ramifications of agriculture combined with technology, fossil fuels, and changing values probably played the biggest roles in this
civilization's rise. The options for the future food supply are many, so there is no need to fear civilization's collapse. Post-collapse scenarios will probably be a mix of all types of food systems depending on available knowledge, land, and resources. Collapse is necessary to provide the impetus needed to speed up research and development of sustainable systems. Certainly, the collapse of the economic system and the resulting decentralization would quickly curtail the most destructive agricultural activities.

The main barrier to the implementation of the viable options to agriculture is their total incompatibility with a world organized around industrial capitalism. But it should be noted that our own habits and cultural programming seem to often be more of a barrier. Wild and perennial food is unlike the fare we are used to. Plus, let's face it, hunter-gatherers were opportunists and our present culture of excess produces many opportunites to be a bottom-feeder within it, with little effort.

Unfortunately, a large portion of the left still romanticize agriculture with the ridiculous Parz vs. Subdivision duality. Some rich rural areas have even legislated fields instead of trees to preserve the pastoral views. Pasture grasses are, by far, the worst invasive plants I have experienced.

The intentional gatherer that uses words like "Feral Plants" will have to contend with the ire of Native Plant enthusiasts, whose xenophobic zeal will definitely prove that a "Native" plant environment is anthropocentric. Meanwhile, their daily food choices are often some of the most destructive to the planet.

Many do not rigorously critique agriculture because it might lead to a critique of daily life. Turns out, it's easier to appease your conscience by revegetating everything with natives and just get your
**Goosetongue**  
*Plantago maritima*

**Hedge Pea**

**Viburnum nudum**

**Viburnum prunifolium**

**Viburnum opulus**

**Vaccinium corymbosum**

**Vaccinium vitis-idaea** subsp. minus

**Vaccinium arboreum**

**Vaccinium oxycoocos**
Dandelion leaves and roots may be eaten raw or boiled. They make excellent, tangy greens.

Thistle root is edible. It may be peeled and eaten raw, boiled or roasted.

Food somewhere else. Hard to commodify edible invasives are eradicated, while natives are destroyed to make room for profit generating crops. Truth be told: agriculture has been far more destructive to the environment than all the invasive plants put together.

I consider a plant to be invasive if it can live in a native "climax ecosystem. The majority of "non native" plant invasions take place in disturbed sites. This clearly implicates agriculture in providing invasive plant habitat. Invasive plants are spreading everywhere because private property and technology allow people to disturb space that they will never personally use or depend on. With invasive plants as a scapegoat, the U.S. government stands ready to implement a proposal that would ban interstate travel and/or importation of over 99% of the world's species of plants, animals, and microorganisms. You can bet most of these are not European in origin.

A lock-down on the food supply?

I have not discussed animal product production because I consume very little. Introduced plant species can provide the missing links to a vegan existence in most ecosystems. Wild meat is much healthier than domesticated meat. If you plant it, they will come. A wide diversity of plants will draw in a wide diversity of animals for potential consumption. If you build prisons they won't come. You will have to forcibly cage domesticated animals. Personally, being a warden just doesn't jive with my anarchist tendencies. Some folks seem to like it, and I'll trade for a homemade wool sweater any day. If livestock seems to be pervasive in your area, there are many actions you can take. Your local agriculture extension office has lists of "invasive" plants that are toxic to livestock. These plants represent our best hope for natural livestock predators. Which invasive is more destructive to the
ecosystem: cows or non-native plants? Genetic engineering is starting to
to genetically pollute most conventional foods. Soon, finding common
foods without any genetic pollution will be impossible. Growing common
vegetables could make you liable in a lawsuit if a patented gene is
found in your crop. Wild edibles may soon be the only edible plants
without genetic pollution. There has never been a better time to jump
ship and go feral.

The explorers in the 'New World' looked only at food plants that
could be capitalized upon. The unknown and underutilized edibles may
represent the plants that are most resistant to capital. Our present
project involves cataloging and experimenting with all known edible
perennial plants that will grow in "our" space. We currently have
several hundred species. All of our greens and a growing percentage of
our staples are currently acquired from outside input perennial
patches. Our bioregion may be more ideal for this than other
bioregions. We have found that using perennial food plants requires
some time to gather the smaller products. Overall, time is saved
considering the lower nutrition, digging, and seed-saving associated
with conventional annuals. Finding which plants do well on your site
and fit your needs is probably the most efficient in the long run. The
only free lunch seems to be the continued use of global trade to
exploit the poor and get cheap food. That has many hidden costs, as
we've all seen.
Complex poly-cultural food systems that draw from the many plants currently available do not fit into any previously lived models of existence.

You cannot find the produce from most perennial and wild plants in the store and most of it may never be attainable through the industrial distribution system. The plants could be bought and sold, but if they grew well year after year, the market could quickly become saturated. The more the system flexes to absorb demand, the more obsolete it becomes! Plants are not plant products however. Acquiring and planting plants requires physical participation by the consumer in order to attain their products. The idea of not being able to just purchase the products seems to be unpalatable to those with high positions in the economic social order. Sorry, you can’t just purchase a solution to agriculture. You have to live it. Agricultural solutions can never be environmental solutions because agriculture itself is inherently an environmental problem.

Recognizing the many plants can seem overwhelming at first, but our minds are designed for it. Brand recognition in the grocery or drug store is this ability, but muted. We ask the plants to give us their strength when we consume them. We feel that wimpy annuals that cannot even survive the winter have little to offer us. Besides producing little nutrition, agriculture is one of the most destructive human activities. Time is running out to implement viable alternatives for the planet and for our own health.

If you are horticulturally minded, botanically inclined, and interested in the ongoing Feral Jihad against Agriculture or if you have a critique of this rant we failed to address, you may attempt to contact us @:
HELP STOP THE WHITE LIST

The government is proposing new, sweeping and highly restrictive policies regarding the importation, cultivation and movement of all living species, allegedly to prevent 'invasive species'. In 1999 the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) was formed. At the inaugural meeting of the NISC, co-chair Bruce Babbitt called for use of a 'white list', where exotic species are presumed guilty until proven innocent. A list of approved, tested 'non-invasive' species would be established, and importation, cultivation and movement of all species not on the approved list would be prohibited.

This proposal will ban over 99% of the world's species of plants, animals and micro-organisms. Anything not approved will have to be exterminated, so major herbicide manufacturers are backing this proposal. Under this new system, expensive safety testing will be required for all new plants before they are approved for possession and propagation. Thus, only major corporations will be able to afford to introduce new plants into cultivation. We already have adequate weed prevention laws - it makes no sense to ban virtually the entire plant kingdom just in case. This is equivalent to the government announcing that only 'pre-approved' books, magazine articles, etc. would be allowed, and all new writings would have to pass through government censors before publication. The world's biological diversity has been likened to a great library, and now government book-burners will be in charge.

The bad news is that the NISC's Management Plan, published October 2000, is worse than we had imagined. It covers all species of life. Everything from butterflies to fish to flowers to trees. Even native species are called invaders on government websites, and the NISC specifically states that they intend to 'apply similar principles... to species currently in the trade.' Clearly, not just new imports are at risk. Even botanic gardens aren't exempt.

The good news is that our anti-white-list campaign is having an effect. Word in Washington DC is that there is lots of dissatisfaction with the NISC and its Management Plan. Due to public outcry against the 'white list', the NISC has renamed the proposal 'comprehensive screening' or 'risk assessment', so that they can now claim that they have no plans to implement a 'white list'. The NISC has been spreading misinformation about their plans through a highly deceptive letter which obscures the facts of the issue, and last summer a rumor was spread claiming the white list was an 'internet hoax'. While the NISC claims they are only concerned with 'invaders', their management plan clearly states that screening and management will apply to all species of living things.

If you have internet access, go to: www.geocities.com/nowhitelist

For more specific information look for Books on Forest gardening, permaculture, wild and native edible plants, and agroforestry. My personal favorites are:

Plants For A Future
Ken Fern
ISBN 1-85623-011-2
One of the best books on alternative edible and useful plants

How To Make A Forest Garden
Patrick Whitefield
ISBN 1-85623-008-2
Great rants along with practical advice

Cornucopia II
Stephen Facciola
A massive consolidation and Botanical listings of all known printed edible plant information

No pictures

Paradise Gardening
Joe Hollis
Great rant
Some of my personal favorite sources for plants are:

Forest Farm
990 Tethrow Rd.
Williams, OR 97544
Massive selection of plants
Catalogue $5
WEB: www.forestfarm.com

HIDDEN SPRINGS NURSERY
170 Hidden Springs Lane
Cookeville, TN 38501
Companion Plants
Catalogue $1
7247 N. Coolville Ridge Rd.
Athens, Ohio 45701
(740) 592-4643

Burnt Ridge Nursery - 432 Burnt Ridge Rd., Onalaska, WA 98570, (360) 985-2873. Specializes in unusual trees, shrubs and vines that produce edible nuts or fruits. Also offers nuts for eating including chestnuts, walnuts, filberts, heartnuts and hickory nuts.

J. L. HUDSON, SEEDSMAN
Star Route 2, Box 337
La Honda, California, 94020 USA

Abundant Life Seed Foundation
P.O. Box 772, Port Townsend, WA 98368
Phone: (360) 385-5660
Fax: (360) 385-7455
e-mail: abundant@olymp.com

Horus Botanicals
341 Mulberry
Salem, Arkansas 72576
Low tech - catalogue $3

Raintree Nursery
391 Butts Road
Morton, WA 98356
www.raintreeursery.com
(360) 496-6400

ONE GREEN WORLD
28696 S. Cramer Road
Molalla, OR 97038-8576
WEB: www.onegreenworld.com
Toll Free: 1-877-353-4028

St. Lawrence Nurseries
1325 State Hwy 345
Potsdam, New York 13676
315-265-6739

Goodwin Creek Gardens
P.O. Box 83
Williams, OR 97544
Phone: (800) 846-7359
F**k Farming!

Eating Beats Mowing

An old woman
The mother of
Seven thousand years
The last lot
A paradox of quantities

A beggar
Burst out a-laughing

Plasticity

A tête-à-tête with
The devil's arms,
Old sun-burn
Trifling bodies

Danced to my
Tattered songs

These
Dirt house
Romance