

We report now from EcoFarm 2024, a splendid and magnificent gathering.

FORAGER

DIRT CHURCH

23 January 2024

We come away from Pacific Grove brim-full of the spirit when the soil's redeemed. The plain ecstasy of the gathering is what brings us back to Asilomar. In Dirt Church we heard old gospels renewed in sermons crafted by shepherdesses and shepherds, interpreting old truths and suggesting new proofs. We sang with Pastor Masumoto who read to us poetry and stories, poignant and glad. We heard good news from Sister Nicole Masters, revealing the plan of the Open Hand. The Open Hand is logical. You'll never hold a thing with a clenched fist. Nor can you give or receive.

Dirt Church is a revival and has long regenerated our peculiar parish. Some people don't think the moment is about spiritual matters but it can't help but be when immersed in so much aspiration. Even a foggy old stick-in-the-mud knows something different is going on. It's up to who to seize the meaning and strike a path.

We've never been keen to proselytize, as do Latter-Day Saints or Jehovah's Witnesses, going from field to field, asking neighbors to repent of their poison and seek organic salvation. We were convinced, but lived more like EcoFarm Amish, meaning to keep a better example rather than seize a sinner by the collar and preach their living daylights out. When a curious farmer enquires about our simpler methods, we've been glad to share our way of less-toxic working. We've always been assured and now have plenty of confirmation after all these years. People want our food and the Philistines are anxious to acquire it for their cities.

Yet people right over the fence-line with whom we share a farming context remain fixed in their ways. They say that both can be right. We wish that they could be, but a whole world may be at risk. Most never dreamed the stakes might be so impossibly high. We aimed to provide folks in town clean food and save a frog and a finch in the bargain, but never imagined that growing peas and vetch would forestall the end of the world.

So tell me now: how can we convince Jones his ammonia is going to burn down the planet? The proposition was far simpler when Jones heard from the county that his spray rig endangered public safety. Jones could see that the county had a point. His uncle Larry's trees got whacked by the Dicamba a few years back and everyone knew it was from the neighbor's mania for immaculate soybeans. Uncle Larry didn't go organic. Jones never gave the Dicamba burn a second thought. If we're careful, says Jones, such methods are safe. The government said so. We've seen questionable farm practices be questioned and abandoned, and we survived. So says Jones. Survived from one year to the next, but never with a solution that lasts. Many organic farmers regenerate the ground and year after year they seem to push their harvests to conclusion at a steady pace. Some say their yields are low, but their corn and their broccoli are just as big and blue as anyone's, and they buy up land as easily as the next farmer. Still, Jones doesn't see himself as one of who, though Lefty just bought a new F-250 to haul his compost trailers around with.

One defense Uncle Larry depends on is "The Science". The Ag-Mags and Extension people dredge up their silver-plated proofs whenever rising water on Sanity Creek needs more sandbags. The antagonism was running high even before the Lefties started cranking on the Climate. Now there's some tasty calumny. All Larry and young Jones hear is blame and shame. But how else are we going to feed the world? Says they. These 92% acres have kept billions alive. Give young Jones that point. But the cost of that success has been out of balance with the unpaid debt to the environment and all the public money that's never been on the ledger.

Now the Dirt Church congregation has uncovered the hidden scrolls of regenerative science. Their far-off California mission at California State University at Chico, reveals economic sustainability in improving the life under our feet. We've loads of converts at the UCs and in Sacramento. Sacramento...Sacramento. That name reminds us pleasantly of something divine. We can make our cake and feed the billions too. The challenge is convincing the Philistines who run the banks to invest in soil, to remake the profit component so the whole "investment" is not at risk. The planet makes plenty of interest-free loans. Profit is a mean wheel that needs a more competent driver whose fist is not so tight. Young Jones and Uncle Larry might take a stab at planting vetch on that miserable back 80 if Dollar and Dollar, LLC would let a farmer take their foot off the gas.

So did we thus learn, affirm and celebrate at the four-day organic January Pentecost of Eco-Farm. We keep coming back because we are sure the organic system is right. For years we depended on the propaganda, but now we have data, our own graphs and scales of redemption. Since the inception of the movement,

what we now call Regenerative was then measured as organic matter, non-mineral humus added to the soil to revive and replenish, to *regenerate*, in other words. As the volume of organic production has grown, we've tended to focus less on the "organic" matter component. I think that must change.

So now please rise with your hymnal to sing *Bringing In The Sheaves* on page 117.

-- Steve Sprinkel

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