The Tapeworm’s Triumph?

Confronting the Parasitic Corporate Underpinnings of U.S. Empire

By Catherine Austin Fitts

The other day a natural healing practitioner explained the strategy used by a tapeworm to prosper. A tapeworm, she said, injected a chemical into its host that triggered a craving by the host for what the tapeworm wished for its dinner. By managing its host’s desire, a tapeworm manipulated its host to set aside self-interest and please its parasite. And so the tapeworm proceeded to consume its host’s energy and health, with the host doing most of the work.

The story of how a tapeworm parasitically eats away at its ecosystem came at a moment when the math lover in me was having an adverse reaction to the description of America as the new Roman Empire that seems to be inspired by the recent occupation of Iraq. The investment economics of American imperial conquest work more along the lines of the tapeworm than of the Romans.

If my rudimentary understanding of the rise and fall of ancient empires is useful, the Roman Empire brought an advancement of science, infrastructure, technology, and material progress to many of the poorer lands that it conquered. In essence, Rome’s territory grew in part from its ability to increase the “return on investment” of many of the places it conquered.

While those who believe in self-determination may not approve of the Romans’ right to do so, or their methods, those of us who appreciate roads, bridges, and infrastructure understand the positive investment yields that the introduction of intellectual capital to a place can generate. From one point of view, Rome financed its conquests not just by ransacking them – but by making places smarter in the material sense.

The tapeworm – a parasite that over time eats its host – can more accurately describe the demonic patterns of stripping places of intellectual capital that come with American imperial conquest. The “dumbing down” so often complained about within America’s borders is a phenomenon that our military appears to be implementing globally. We seem intent on removing spiritual power and intellectual IQ as we depopulate globally, moving out the honest and competent and putting the corrupt and bureaucratic in charge.

One of the most disturbing things about the American tapeworm is that it has organized its

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Beyond Organic

Investing In Vermont’s Local Food Economies

By George Schenk

On Thursday, June 15, 2006, the Vermont Department of Health served American Flatbread owner George Schenk with an injunction after he announced his intention to serve chicken obtained from neighboring farmer Hadley Gaylord at his Waitsfield restaurant, to protest a state law prohibiting farmers from selling even a single chicken to local businesses without proper state certification. The following article by Schenk, written prior to “The Chicken Event” (and slightly modified after the injunction) highlights the thinking behind his proposal to use “entrepreneurial nonviolent civil disobedience” to help create a more fair and equitable local food economy.

American Flatbread owner George Schenk, left, with Waitsfield farmer Hadley Gaylord.

Think of a farm, and what image comes to mind? A house and barn surrounded by fields and woods. A few chickens in the yard, a big garden, a pen of pigs and a small herd of cows in the pasture. This, or something similar is what most of us think of because for about as long as we can remember this is what farms looked like. They called them family farms and they functioned within the context of nature and their communities. Although far from perfect and often difficult, at a fundamental level family farming produced both delicious and nutritious foods, conserved open space and was a durable foundation upon which democracy and civil society flourished.

That was food’s past. Today very little of our food comes from such places.

Beginning after the First World War and accelerating after the Second, small family farms gave way to large corporate organizations that to the greatest extent possible stripped the messy complexity of

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Editorial

Free Vermont: Going Back To The Future

Two hundred thirty years ago this month, a small group of men and women living in a loosely-knit group of colonial frontier communities at the edge of what Europeans called “the known world” produced a document announcing their intention to secede from the most powerful empire on the planet.

You may remember. We call it the 1776 Declaration of Independence.

A declaration that, at its core, is about secession. Close collaboration between the British Empire’s political and economic elite – King George, the Parliament, and proto-corporations like the British East India Tea Company – ran London’s 18th century empire.

And all of our most celebrated “revolutionaries” – George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John and Abigail Adams, Ben Franklin – were British subjects AND political secessionists.

Our Founding Mothers and Fathers lived lives governed by the arbitrary rule of Parliament and King George. Until 1776.

Here’s what our secession-minded Founding Fathers (and Mothers) proclaimed during the summer of that fateful year:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Laughable claims, at a time when kings and czars, queens and emperors held sway, most folks did as they were told, and the world knew nothing of democratic republics, except what a few educated 18th century elites may have learned in their study of the ancient world.

That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Any government, in other words, ultimately answered to the people. Not the other way around.

That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Savor these words. They are the foundations of our North American experiment in self-government.

More than two centuries later, as citizen-subjects of the most powerful empire the world has ever known (U.S. vs. us), we face challenges as great as those faced by our secession-minded founders.

Consider:

• Stupendous corporate corruption and illegal and immoral “taxation without representation.” As former Bush I Administration insider Catherine Austin Fitts details in this issue (page 1), our hard-earned wealth is being parasitically siphoned off on behalf of the very few super-rich at the expense of the rest of us.

• The twin scourges of global climate change and global Peak Oil bearing down on us while our hard-fruits and labor are being parasitically siphoned off on behalf of the very few super-rich at the expense of the rest of us.

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Under the leadership of the Bush Administration, the United States of America has become a pariah nation. We have joined a small coterie of rogue states, and have earned condemnation for torture, war crimes, and illegal invasion, with special recognition for delusions of grandeur. Our political leaders in Congress, both Republican and Democrat, continually fail and shame us with their woefully useless defense against President Bush’s assault on the Constitution’s separation of powers. They fail to do anything but moan about repeated breaches of federal law and the Constitution. They are so cowed by their perception of popular opinion as presented to them by their corporate sponsors that they will not speak out to end the illegal, immoral and devastating war in Iraq. With too few exceptions, they are incapable of responsible action, having been co-opted by the values of America’s wealthy elite, and by the realities of existing at the edge of the corporate trough.

We used to rely upon the journalistic community to keep watch on our government and sound the alarm when necessary. The printing of the Pentagon Papers proved instrumental in making the country rethink the Vietnam War. Reporters at the Washington Post did not stop investigating a story until it revealed the lawbreaking of a president.

But today, most journalistic enterprises have been bought by a handful of corporate conglomerates, most of which are also heavily entrenched in the U.S. military/industrial complex. And while there are many journalists who search for news, and editors who support them, many more are finding that there is no longer interest or budgets for significant news coverage. The star journalists who deliver our news have themselves been elevated to the ranks of the wealthy, and see the politicians they are covering as peers rather than subjects.

It is clearly up to us to do what our leaders will not. As a citizen in this country, we each have a duty to defend the Constitution that offers us our rights and protections. When we see lawlessness, violence, and immoral policies being conducted in our name, we must not only speak, we must act to end them.

This means that we have to act to stop the war. We must act to impeach Bush and Cheney for violations of federal law and the Constitution. It is no longer enough to have an opinion, or even to express it freely. We have an obligation to join the entire nation in a massive vote of NO confidence in this administration. We have to unite in unprecedented numbers to shame the U.S. government into ending its war.

So, how can we achieve this as mere citizens? We can create an unstoppable wave that will crash over Washington’s chaos of non-governance and force corrective actions. And we will set that wave in motion by starting at home. Every town and hamlet of this and every state needs to be forced to debate the questions of right and wrong that are forced upon us by the Bush Administration. No household should be allowed to remain untouched by the arguments for and against the government’s actions.

In Vermont, we have preserved the tradition that allows any one of us to petition a special town meeting. The vote of a town on matters like the war and impeachment has special weight and significance. Our towns are not simply the number of voters who stopped by the polling place. Rather, they are each a polity of people who know one another, who enter into civil discussion about matters of great emotional and political import, and who still do business with one another when they go back out of the meeting house doors. Our town meetings pay due respect to citizens’ common sense and intuitive understanding of right and wrong.

There will be few towns that, after hearing the arguments for and against, would vote to continue the war or allow the president to continue his law-breaking. It is up to every one of us to see that our town gets a chance to have that debate and render its verdict. And it will be up each of us to get the news about our democratic actions out to the rest of the nation. Through the internet, letters to the editor, calls to news organizations, our sheer numbers and persistence will make this story a compelling and far-reaching one.

Movements organizing for impeachment and the end of the war in Iraq are growing in states in all areas of the country. As we are working at home, so are they. More than 17,000 Americans have filed individual memorials of impeachment to send to the U.S. Speaker of the House. Not a week passes without another town or organization standing up to defend the Constitution against the violations of our government.

When a state finds itself under assault, it needs to respond appropriately. If an army is at our border, we would call out the militia. When our federal government’s actions are untenable, we must reject that government. Essentially, we must see ourselves as in a state of constitutionally mandated insurrection. If we then discover that the only way that we can function legally and morally is by permanently severing relations with the U.S. government, then we’ll have to face the question of secession that the Second Vermont Republic advocates have been raising for the last couple of years.

The danger we face today is rampant militarism running amok, supposedly in our name. We need to mobilize ourselves to respond. We must prepare ourselves to join with others this fall and descend upon Washington by the hundreds of thousands. We must be prepared to stay there, firmly planted between the politicians and their business as usual. We must look to the success of people power in such diverse locations as the Philippines, Poland, Nepal, and Venezuela for inspiration.

Individual Americans like Cindy Sheehan, Scott Ritter, and Richard Clarke are showing us all how to act as true Americans. Each of them has persevered in spite of spurious attacks and character assassination from those who feel threatened by their truths. Though they will try, defenders of the administration will not be able to paint towns voting for impeachment and the end of the war with
As Americans, we are addicted to fossil fuel energy. As most of our food has been grown with fossil-fuel-based fertilizers and pesticides, and has traveled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to reach our plates. A free Vermont, led by local coalitions of farmers, entrepreneurs, community networks, and educated food consumers, will re-invent itself by embracing “food sovereignty,” working to ensure a safe and adequate agricultural system and food supply to feed our citizens in a post-carbon world. Read “American Flatbread” co-founder Robin McDermott’s inspiring words (page 8) to learn more.

As Americans and Vermonters, we are accustomed to living in a political culture where other people, often living in distant places, make decisions for us. In a free Vermont, this, too, will change. But only if we work together to make it so.

Decentralizing political power—from D.C. to the Green Mountains, and from Montpelier to every one of our 256 cities, towns and villages—is essential.

Re-localizing our economic life, too, is vital. And any future success in a free Vermont must look past the manufactured dualisms that divide us: Liberals versus conservatives. Republicans versus Democrats. Blue states versus red.

Any future success in a free Vermont, instead, must identify those common principles—sustainable energy, food sovereignty, homestead security, and yes, peaceful secession—upon which we can agree and build.

The 21st century world is changing.

The 21st century world will look little like the 20th.

Free Vermont.

Long live the (dis)United States.

Happy Independence Day.

Rob Williams
Editor
Two Hundred Years Is Long Enough

I
Two hundred years ago with the redcoats on
The Republic of Vermont was what we thought we would become
But it’s never of full pockets or full bellies could we brag
So we sewed the fourteenth star upon the flag

II
You remember Ira Allen? He had a brother of great fame –
You must remember Baker, for Remember was his name
What would Baker or the Allen boys or Seth Warner say
If they could see the state we’re in today?

CHORUS
Cause it’s two hundred years we’ve served the Union well
Shared our bit of heaven, and raised our share of Hell -
Y’know we always did our part when the goin’ got rough,
But two hundred years is long enough!

III
There’s trouble in the heartland where they can’t afford their homes
Trouble in the cities where the gangs of junkies roam
They’ve got trouble in the oilfields, and in the cornfields, too -
This country’s in bad trouble through and through!

Up here in God’s Country, they’re starving us again
How can we eat their empty promises an’ drink their acid rain?
And every time we send a message down to Washington, DC
We get the damn thing back again marked C.O.D.!

REPEAT CHORUS

IV
Why should we feed the bankers, if they won’t feed our farms,
Or run and point a gun at folks who ain’t done us no harm?
Come all you ‘clayfoots’, you ‘woodchucks’,
you freedom-lovers all -
Stand up and cheer to hear secession’s call!
It’s Vermonters to the lifeboats: this is a sinkin’ ship
And aren’t you sick to death of tryin’ to read the captain’s lips?
We’ve got a better boat, and she’s ready, don’t y’know?
We started buildin’ her two hundred years ago!

Repeat Chorus
Republicanism and Size (Part 3 of 3 parts)

By Donald W. Livingston

(This three-part essay explores the historical development of the concept of the “republic” as an organized polity from ancient times to the present. Part 1 was published in the March 2006 issue of Vermont Commons, while we published Part 2 in our April issue. Readers interested in revisiting those previous articles can contact VC – see page two for contact information – or find them on our website.)

Let me first sum up the argument from the first two parts of this extended essay on “republicanism and size.” From the Greeks on, it was held that a republic had to be small (somewhere in the range of 50,000 to 200,000 people or fewer). Rousseau’s The Social Contract (1761) was modeled on his beloved Geneva, a city that had a population of 25,000. And it was commonly believed that a large polity demanded monarchy (which in the 18th century was a code word for a centralized unitary state). After achieving independence, Americans faced a dilemma. They were determined to be republicans, but the vast political boundaries they inherited were drawn by the British Crown, and so seemed to demand monarchical government as both John Adams and Alexander Hamilton said.

The matter was not hopeless. For although the states were too large, they were sparsely populated. At the time of independence no city held more than 30,000 people. As population increased, the state could be divided through secession in the direction of a human republican scale. And so what are today known as the states of Kentucky and West Virginia seceded from Virginia. Tennessee seceded from North Carolina, and Maine from Massachusetts. Each entered the Union as a sovereign state on terms of equality with the other states. But each of these new states was large enough to demand monarchical government. So it would appear that even these States, as their populations expanded, would have to be divided, and divided again, to achieve the traditional scale of republican government.

Or did they? David Hume was the first to challenge the traditional belief that a republic had to be small. In 1752 he published an essay, “Idea of a Republic” (1761) was modeled on his beloved Geneva, a city that had a population of 25,000. And it was commonly believed that a large polity demanded monarchy (which in the 18th century was a code word for a centralized unitary state). After achieving independence, Americans faced a dilemma. They were determined to be republicans, but the vast political boundaries they inherited were drawn by the British Crown, and so seemed to demand monarchical government as both John Adams and Alexander Hamilton said.

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Or did they? David Hume was the first to challenge the traditional belief that a republic had to be small. In 1752 he published an essay, “Idea of a Republic.” He called the best polity “one that a republic could be large, but that if properly ordered, a large republic would be the best polity.

He began by accepting the traditional view that, all things being equal, a small republic would be the best polity. But small states are vulnerable to conquest by larger ones. The remedy was a large state composed of small republics. He called the latter “county republics.” These would have considerable autonomy over morals, education, and social welfare, leaving to the central authority such general matters as defense, foreign treaties, and commerce. Hume observed that such a polity was already mirrored in the Swiss federation and the United Provinces, and he saw no reason why a country the size of Britain or France could not be ordered in this way. Strictly speaking, such a polity would not be a republic in the traditional sense, but it would not be entirely arbitrary to call it a republic insofar as its “county republics,” which were of traditional republican scale, retained a tolerably high level of self government.

Jefferson had read Hume, and it might have been Hume’s essay that inspired his project of dividing Virginia into what he called “ward republics,” each of which would retain considerable autonomy over its local affairs. “Each ward,” he said, “would thus be a small Republic within itself, and every man in the state would thus become an acting member of the common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties, subordinate indeed, but important, and entirely within his competence. The wit of man cannot devise a more solid base for a free, durable, and well administered Republic.”

Jefferson knew that Virginia was already too large to be a proper republic, and that the remedy should be division of the territory into small cantonal states. Just as the Constitution guarantees to each state a republican form of government (Art IV, Sec. IV), so Jefferson argued that Virginia should guarantee this privilege to each ward republic. He put it this way: “Just as Cato ended every speech with ‘Carthage must be destroyed,’ so do I [end] every opinion with the injunction: divide the counties into wards.”

The United States were born in secession, carried out in the name of human-scale republicanism. Insofar as republican government was taken for granted as such a polity was a code word for a centralized unitary state. After achieving independence, Americans faced a dilemma. They were determined to be republicans, but the vast political boundaries they inherited were drawn by the British Crown, and so seemed to demand monarchical government as both John Adams and Alexander Hamilton said.

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After the war to suppress secession (1861-1865), the tradition of secession and division in the direction of human-scale republicanism was still strong. Most of the secession movements in the antebellum period had their source in quarrels over the disposition of western territory, extending now to the Pacific through conquests and purchases from Mexico.

In 1843, John Quincy Adams and other New England leaders argued that the annexation of Texas meant the secession of New England. Three decades earlier Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts argued in the House of Representatives that the admission of Louisiana as a State, without a constitutional amendment, would justify the secession of New England. His speech is a window through which we can see how strong republican dispositions were at that time.

“I hold,” he declared, “my life, liberty, and propriety, as the people of the State, from which I have the honor to be a representative, hold theirs by a better tenure than any this National Government can give... We hold these by the laws, customs, and principles of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Behind her ample shield we find refuge, and feel safety.... Sir, I confess it, the first public love of my heart is the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The love of this Union grows out of this attachment to my native soil, and is rooted in it. I cherish it, because it affords the best external hope for her peace, her prosperity, her independence” (italics mine).

Notice that Quincy treats the Union as an instrument created by the states for their prosperity. Later Lincoln would treat the Union (in the manner of emerging European nationalism) not as an instrument but as a mystical end in itself. In post-Lincolnian rhetoric the Union would no longer be a federation of republics, but the republic, “one and indivisible.”

But an indivisible unitary state is precisely what the Founders used ‘monarchy’ as a codeword for. Quincy went on to say that the admission of Louisiana, without a constitutional amendment, would justify secession: “It is my deliberate opinion that it is virtually a dissolution of this Union; that it will free the States from their moral obligation; continued on page 16
I am wary of talk of independence that doesn't start with the willingness and knowledge of how to grow healthy food. I am wary of calls for secession that don't include mention of what will succeed our maples.

Forget politics, let's talk about soil.

Are we really loyal to our own soil? Let me make a straightforward proposition: all talk of the future of nations and states that doesn't start with the fundamentals of soil, and our relationship to it, is the domain of armchair revolutionaries.

Soil and land is the foundation of our cultural house. It isn't the roof, or the walls, or the windows, or the plumbing, but land – and our relationship to it – supports and defines all the characteristics that we call humanity and community. And from this awareness comes a glimpse of another truth: our true wealth and security comes from that relationship to the land. If we want political independence then we must start in the right place: with how all Vermonters live on the land and in community. Those relationships determine whether we subject ourselves to systems and economies beyond our control, or liberate ourselves to be fully human.

Vermont is quickly evolving from a land-based culture, one capable of producing what it needs to feed and shelter itself, to a consumer-based culture, one that is largely dependent on someone else's land and labor. For example, although I live in a fertile valley dotted with farms, many folks in our community eat food transported from thousands of miles away and purchased in a chain store with little connection to any of us. In doing so, our relationships change from immediate, apparent, and intimately woven, to distant, vague, and loose.

Another way to describe this is that we're evolving from a whole community into a large collection of disconnected individuals. Writ large, we're evolving from a nation of citizens into a nation of consumers. This is a true description of losing one's independence.

In Black Elk Speaks, John Neihardt writes, "I think I have told, but if I have not you must have understood, that a man who has a vision is not able to use the power of that vision until he has performed the vision on earth for people to see." An important vision is beginning to take shape in the bone and muscle of this Vermont Commons community, but we have the burden of making that vision real not through words, but through performing it on the earth for people to see.

What does true independence taste like? The best way we can demonstrate independence is to celebrate all the ways that Vermonters are living independently. Positive stories are one powerful way of confronting the broken underbelly of our culture.

Our objective is simple: we want our country and our land to thrive. Our problem is also quite simple: we have not yet told a story that sticks. We have not yet told a story that is about what we love, rather than what we fear. We have not yet performed that vision on earth for people to see.

Secession as a cultural act

Consider these questions that are being asked at this very moment in my own community. Will my children be able to afford to live here? Who will be in our schools when our population becomes largely composed of second- and third-home owners? Who will serve on the ambulance squad when young people can't afford these real estate prices? Will there be a home in Vermont for mountain lions before there is affordable housing for Vermonters? Why do I no longer feel welcome here? How will our community build roads without gravel? How will we feed ourselves without active farmland? Why doesn't anyone care?

So, as we talk about political secession, we've got to create the positive picture of people living in close relationship to the land and to one another. This can be a beautiful and inspiring picture, one that encourages, rather than demands, change. The United States desperately needs the example of Vermont, not just as a museum of protected land that's beautiful to look at, but as a vibrant community where many people still earn some or all of their livelihood and identity from the land.

Secession can be a cultural act as important as a political act. We can secede today from the values that disturb us, such as hyper-consumption, and a society where corporations have more power than communities. We can challenge the laws and the culture that disturbs us by creating a different set of economic and ecological relationships in our own communities.

The very best aspects of the American spirit – our sense of community, generosity, dependability – came from the traditions involving how we lived on the land. The opposite is also true: our intolerance, our capacity for greed and inhumanity, have been played out on the land. All of these possibilities are in us as Vermonters, and we write them on the land, where they form our memory and mark our morality.

The soul of Vermont is continually re-born through our living out of these epic choices around our relationship to land and to one another. And that relationship can be good, bad, or plain ugly. It's good when the relationship is about respect, joy and limitations. It's bad when it shows us stealing from our children for ourselves. It's ugly when it alienates any of us from our rights as humans.

What happens when people and communities lose that relationship with the land? Do the values stay? Do laws protect what's already left the heart? I think not. Laws cannot protect what's already left the heart.

Struggling for a healthy relationship with the land through how we live, what we eat, and who we welcome at the table, is transformational because it ultimately is about love and healing. It's about relationships. And most of us understand this, without having to know all the science, because we humans – at our core – are more tuned to relationship than to isolation.

Lives at odds

Now, however, a great divide is emerging in Vermont.

Vermont is filling up with people living mostly urban lives in a largely rural place.

The history of Vermont's relationship to the land is revealing and helpful. One hundred and forty years ago Vermonters lived extremely close to the land, and that relationship became over-bearing. Over time, the relationship between our land and our citizens collapsed under a bad marriage. The last mountain lion was shot in 1881. Around that same time, black bear, fisher cat, turkey, and deer became virtually extinct due to over-grazing and the deforestation of our hills. The human population crashed in response, leaving telltale cellar holes in what is now forested land. Squirrel replaced venison in the dinner pot. By 1900, the Norway rat became the most pervasive creature in Vermont.

Fast-forward ahead 125 years and Vermont's human population has created a more mutually beneficial relationship to the land. There are more people living in our communities, and biodiversity has increased as well. Turkey, deer, bear are thriving. Nearly 80 percent of our landscape has returned to forest. The rivers are much cleaner than they were 50 years ago. There aren't as many farms, and dairy operations struggle more then ever, but other forms of agriculture are prospering at a different scale. The most important evidence of Vermont's success is that we have the highest percentage of people who earn some of their livelihood from the land. Vermonters are in the woods, in the fields, and on the land more than in almost any other state in America.

Back in the 1970s the people of Vermont, then one of the poorest states in the nation, asked themselves a critical question: What is a whole community, and how do we get there? We defined a new, healthier relationship to the land and, frankly, we did it through a set of environmental laws that set limits on people. Vermont has prospered under those limits, but also because those laws encouraged our chosen ways of life, and defined our community-on-the-land.

Now Vermont is changing again. There are fewer of us who hunt in the fall, who sugar in the spring, and who earn some portion of our livelihood from the land. The average Vermont six-year-old, meanwhile, consumes thousands and thousands of advertisements before entering first grade, the advertisements telling them what they should love – objects, mostly, stuff – and who they should want to be.

This story of what it means to be alive, and an American, is what we as Vermonters should want to scribe from. Politics aside, we should abandon any story that diminishes our own relationship to the land, and therefore our intimate knowledge of what matters most for us and our children.

Start with the Land

By Peter Forbes
Growing A New Food Paradigm: Vermonters Plant Localvore Chapters

By Robin McDermott

Previous issues of Vermont Commons have questioned whether our state has the agricultural resources to feed itself. Now, groups of people throughout the state are learning firsthand just how easy (or difficult) this might be.

It all started last August when a small group of people from the Upper Valley area of the state decided they would try to go for one month eating only locally grown and produced foods. They got the idea from a group of like-minded people in the San Francisco Bay area who did just that and called themselves “Locavores.” The Upper Valley group decided to call themselves Localvores (adding an “I”) and signed pledges promising to eat food grown and produced within a 100-mile radius of their homes during the month of August.

Sure, eating only local food during our bountiful harvest season at the end of the summer sounds like it would be a pretty easy thing to do. But what this group discovered is that there are not only some limitations, but some gaping holes in our local food system that can make “eating local” a challenge.

In today’s world, when we are used to eating whatever we want, when we want, regardless of the season, the Upper Valley Localvores learned quickly that they would have to make some substantial changes to their diets, and that they would need to do serious research if they were going to make it through the month.

But the group persevered.

By the end of August they had a renewed appreciation for local agriculture, tremendous respect for the farmers in the state who grow food, and enough enthusiasm to fuel several other similar groups throughout the state.

Today there are at least five Vermont Localvore groups (Champlain Valley, Mad River Valley, Central Vermont, the Upper Valley, and Brattleboro). The common thread among all of the groups is the “Challenge.” This is the “main event” where members of the group pledge to eat only locally grown and produced food during a specified period of time. Most groups are holding their next Challenge in August; we in the Mad River Valley have chosen mid-September for our Localvore Challenge.

The rules for the Challenge vary from group to group. Some are very strict, sticking with totally local ingredients. The Upper Valley Localvores allow each participant a number of “wild cards” that might include non-local foods such as chocolate, coffee, or olive oil, as examples. The Champlain Valley Localvores have created a series of “Marco Polo” rules that range from allowing spices that a sailor could have carried in his pocket for six months, to allowing anything that will get you through the Challenge.

Obviously, in August the abundance and variety of vegetables makes eating local pretty easy. Who can’t make a dinner out of corn on the cob with local butter and tomatoes fresh from the garden on a hot August day?

But, what if you wanted a salad? What would you use for salad dressing? Vinaigrette is great on freshly picked lettuce, but what would you use for oil? Olive oil would be a good choice, but since olives don’t grow too well in Vermont you would need to find another source of oil.

And what about bread? There are a lot of exceptional bread makers in our state, but very few of them use wheat or grains harvested or processed in Vermont.

Dried beans (legumes) are a great source of protein, but try to find local black beans or kidney beans in your grocery store. Do these types of beans even grow in Vermont?

Even things that you would think would be easy to find, like local milk and butter, can be tricky. Ask about the origins of that “Vermont” milk at the grocery store and you may be surprised to learn that it comes from dairy farms in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, and beyond, depending on the time of year, according to a January 2005 article in the Vermont Guardian.

Being so picky about where our food comes from might seem like splitting hairs, but it does make you start to think about how self-sufficient we Vermonters really are when it comes to food.

And, we haven’t even talked about eating locally and supporting the local economy, but experiencing it first-hand is different. That is when you really start to appreciate just how tough eating local can be. As you become familiar with the resources that we do have available in Vermont — and more important, what we are lacking — you gain a much better appreciation for the hardworking farmers we have in the state. You start thinking differently about the choices you make at the grocery store. Do you really want to pay a dollar for something when only 8 cents or 9 cents of that
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Living Post-Carbon: Vermonters Begin Grappling With Global Peak Oil

By Dennis Derryberry

During the past several months, as the ominous phrase “Peak Oil” has begun appearing on the U.S. public’s collective radar screen, hundreds of forward-thinking Vermonters already have decided to look for new ways to live that do not rely upon the use of fossil fuel energy. Just a few months since its creation, the Vermont Peak Oil Network (VPON) website (www.vtpeakoil.net) has brought together at least nine local and regional groups that have rallied around the possibility of creating an alternative energy future in the face of dramatically increasing fossil fuel energy costs and shrinking production capacity globally.

This is thinking and acting locally. This is choosing energy independence.

Not surprisingly, the main pursuit of each VPON group is to establish a permanently sustainable local agricultural and energy supply at the community level. Less than one year after New York Times writer Peter Maass landed an empty fuel gauge on the cover of the flagship newspaper’s Sunday Times Magazine (See NYT, “The Breaking Point,” August 21, 2005), the VPON website now offers a host of creative solutions for re-inventing local Vermont economies around more sustainable agricultural and energy systems.

VPON (www.vtpeakoil.net) is largely the brain-child of Annie Dunn Watson, a Burlington College professor who, after viewing the Peak Oil documentary film The End of Suburbia in the fall of 2004, found herself disturbed to notice how many Vermonters seemed unaware of the looming crisis.

The next few months became a time of “trying to identify the best means of spreading the word,” Watson said. One idea was to teach a course on Peak Oil, which she did this spring. She sponsored a March screening of Suburbia at the college and, with her partner Moshe Briner, she tried to start a peak oil group.

Neither effort saw much success. “It just wasn’t the right time,” Watson said. “The issue took a while to infiltrate the larger Vermont community dialogue.”

Watson – who is trained in psychology and studies social attitudes, conflict and mediation – had discovered a tricky psychological problem surrounding the Peak Oil issue. “We grew up in this age of abundance,” she said, speaking of the post-World War II generation. Americans who have lived their lives in step with a U.S.-dominated global fossil-fuel economy offering ubiquitous transportation, consumer, and technological offerings. “This sense of material entitlement makes us very reluctant to accept or even acknowledge the vision of a world with less. Americans are going to have a hard time dealing with the changes ahead.”

Watson contacted The Community Solution (www.communitysolution.org), an Ohio-based group that promotes the development of small, locally focused communities and had recently studied Cuba’s response to the sudden and dramatic loss of Soviet oil in the 1990s. She then attended a community training seminar in Ohio in December 2005, where she said the most important lesson was “to try to stay ahead of the curve, because it will be hard.”

Back in Vermont, Watson suddenly discovered that groups were springing up around the state to confront the topic and organize at the local level. She realized it would be helpful for these groups to connect, and created VPON, an online networking resource enabling individuals from all over the state to find a way to become involved.

Watson quickly assembled content and tech support from everyone involved, acting “more like an assistant midwife” than creator. “It was an idea whose time had come.” The website was up and running even before some participants fully understood the value of organizing as a group.

The vtpeakoil.net website contains information on the growing number of local and regional groups that have formed to date, from the Brattleboro area south to the Cabot region in the north. In addition to Vermont resources, the site lists portals to national and even international sites for community-building and education, including the Post Carbon Institute (PCI) and the Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO), two of the most prominent global groups looking for solutions.

“Each person and each group is inherently very resourceful and creative,” says Watson. “VPON helps us find one another, but the real force of the network is found in individual community efforts. These regional groups are beginning to think about how they can really work within their communities to create a kind of safety net of people working together,” she said.

VPON also offers the opportunity for the regional groups to meet and perhaps collaborate on common initiatives. This is particularly useful when looking at issues that might affect the state as a whole, such as those determined through legislative or local policy processes.

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Preparations

Working with the East Montpelier “Second Tuesdays” group, Carl Etienne convened close to a dozen such officials in March to brainstorm ways the state might better prepare for Peak Oil. Etienne’s outreach has widened now to include meetings with regional planning commissioners, a strategy suggested by Ginny Lyons, the chair of the Vermont Senate Natural Resources Committee. Public-education initiatives like these greatly inform future discussions of sustainability in Vermont’s individual communities and within the Legislature, as new agriculture and energy-preparedness bills are introduced (see discussion of H654, below).

Mad River Valley resident Tom Fugate, an early leader of what is now called the Mad River Sustainability Group, heard the Peak Oil call years ago and has been preparing to live in a “post-carbon world” for some time. Fugate is certified in bio-intensive growing practices, and now operates a small Community-Supported Agriculture farm (CSA) out of Moretown. This year, Fugate will expand upon the bio-intensive growing workshops held at his farm by taking his knowledge on the road, leading demonstrations and tutorials for other community groups.

Take two other VPON leaders. Windham County’s Post Oil Solutions, and ACORN (the Addison County Relocalization Network), serve as models for newly forming groups elsewhere in the state. Both groups are exploring the formalization of food and/or energy cooperatives to boost their ability to develop and deploy their own agricultural and power-generation initiatives.

Co-ops could act as umbrellas for a wide range of possible renewable offerings, starting with home energy audits, consultations and site evaluations, then moving forward through efficient design incorporating renewable grid-based usage via streamlining of mechanical systems and appliances, and integrating photovoltaic (PV), solar thermal, and wind turbine installations. A co-op could help organize the entire local agricultural market, connecting individual and local business-demand data with farmer supply in a network of CSAs. A co-op might collect aggregate orders for locally produced bio-diesel or wood pellets (See Vermont Commons, May 2006 issue), which have soared in popularity and have quickly fallen into short supply. A co-op would seek to identify, promote, develop, and perhaps own a range of community renewable projects, and might help to jump-start individual project spin-offs.

Legislature Steps Up

This past winter at the State House in Montpelier, meanwhile, a handful of visionary state legislators introduced legislation to address this complicated crossroads. State Rep. Jim Masland (D-Thetford) introduced H654, sponsored by a mix of Democrats and Progressives.

Essentially, H654 seeks to implement a resource-management plan to alleviate any critical drop in the food, water, and power supply. Regional planning commissions and statewide departments could conduct resource analyses for food, water, and renewable energy potential and use them to create an operational framework to securely provide such needs “sufficient to feed the local population with locally grown food . . . in time of extended shortages of petroleum and other nonrenewable sources of energy.”

H654 also calls for the statewide identification of all primary agricultural land, and would prohibit conversion of such land to other purposes unless it had been determined that such lands were not critical “to provide locally or regionally the food necessary to feed at least 125 percent of the current population of the municipality for an indefinite period.” Regional planning commissions, meanwhile, would oversee work to identify “fire and safety facilities, hospitals, emergency shelters, and other critical local facilities that should be recipients of locally based, renewable distributed power.” In support of this, the Department of Public Service would generate “specific recommendations regarding the potential for replacing petroleum-based fuels and other fuels derived from nonrenewable sources of energy with bio-fuels or other renewable energy alternatives produced within the state.”

This may sound impressive, but according to co-sponsor David Zuckerman (D-Burlington), H654 failed to gain any serious traction within the Agriculture Committee, and sponsors knew early that “it was not likely to go anywhere this year.” Even in defeat, Zuckerman concludes, the bill represents one more step toward “getting Vermonters oriented toward thinking that we will need to have an organized, sustainable food supply.”

A choice

As Vermonters begin to grapple with global Peak Oil and its implications, we can choose to live independently. We can begin to opt out of the Peak Oil peril and implement our own long-term renewable agricultural and energy resources. It is time for us to pare down and prepare. We must all learn again how to produce and share food with our neighbors. At the very least, every community in Vermont should, without delay, develop an adequate plan for sustainable farming, heating and the gathering of water, allowing communities to function more independently of escalating energy costs.

It will require great vigilance and ongoing effort. But if we can establish a sustainable footing for our fundamental needs, Vermont will be that much more ready to stand on its own as a post-oil future looms.

Localvore Internet resources:

Upper Valley Localvores:
www.vitalcommunities.org

Mad River Valley Localvores:
www.vermontlocalvore.org (this site has links to other state Localvore groups)

Champlain Valley Localvores:
www.eatlocalvt.org

The Original Locavores:
www.locavores.com

ACME Vermont offers an extensive guide on food and a recommended curriculum for educators titled “Food For Thought.” See www.acmecoalition.org/page.cfm?ID=84

Recommended Reading:
Holy Cows and Hog Heaven by Joel Salatin
OmniVores Dilemma by Michael Pollan
Fall Moon Feast by Jessica Prentice

CALL FOR REPRESENTATIVES

TO THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN SECESSIONIST CONVENTION

The Middlebury Institute herewith issues a call for representatives of active organizations and groups in North America concerned with the idea of separation to attend a convention in Burlington, Vermont, this coming November.

We are seeking to provide a forum where people with a serious interest in secession from the United States, Canada, and Mexico can present information on what each organization is doing, learn the policies and tactics of other organizations, trade ideas on organizing, strategizing, and political-ticking, assess the strength of the secession movement, and figure out ways to make it stronger and more successful. It is understood from the beginning that there are many varied groups with secession as the core of their strategy; and it is unlikely that there will be any full consensus on platforms or goals. But if we can assemble articulate and activist representatives from serious, ongoing groups that are working in their various ways to push the idea of secession at a regional, state, or multi-state level, we are convinced that we can advance the cause of secession throughout the continent and pave the way for some genuine successes.

The Middlebury Institute is willing to underwrite the travel costs for some of those representatives, especially from the western reaches of the continent, who are unable to pay their own way. We are unable to absorb the two-night hotel room fees, but we will provide a conference room for a Saturday meeting and a banquet on Saturday night.

Individuals from real, active, serious, and ongoing secessionist and separatist organizations—please, no individual secessionists or the like—are urged to contact the Director@MiddleburyInstitute.net if they wish to take part in the first North American Secessionist Convention.
Fitts continued from page 1

leadership around private banks and defense contractors and its governance and intellectual air cover around think tanks and private universities and their tax-exempt endowments.

In so doing it has done a marvelous job of getting the intellectual resources of the nation disengaged from dealing with what is happening, and engaged – if not financially dependent on – producing chemicals for injection into the body politic through a highly centralized corporate media that will feed the tapeworm’s desire.

The Harvard Watch description of Harvard academics creating the public policy justifications for Enron’s frauds while the Harvard endowment fed at the trough illuminated a perfect example of how the tapeworm gets the host to act against its own self-interest.

The “Break It-Fix It” Subsidy of a Negative Return on Investment Economy

For several years, I have been studying and writing on the corporate and banking economic-warfare model of globalization. Just from a case study of one private investor, Pug Winokur, and his investments in and with DynCorp, Enron, and Harvard, examples abound.

- U.S. neighborhoods are overrun with narcotics trafficking and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) financial fraud, while systematically worked by enforcement, seizure and War on Drugs teams supported by DynCorp and generating profits for the Harvard Endowment;
- Latin American pipelines, water and other assets are sold at significant discounts to market value to Enron and other multinational investors, while DynCorp helps War on Drugs military teams move peasants off the lands;
- Russian banks and pension funds are emptied out by organized crime and laundered through New York Fed member banks, while Harvard, as financial advisor helps privatize Russian oil companies over to their endowment investment network;
- DynCorp personnel supplying police and aircraft maintenance are active with local mafia in Eastern Europe and practice buying and selling children as slaves which they use for sex;
- $1.3 trillion is missing from the Department of Defense and HUD where Lockheed, DynCorp, and AMS are active managing computer systems and Harvard supplies appointees and contract services;
- Manipulation of the gold markets by the U.S. Treasury and New York Fed member banks are led by Larry Summers (former Secretary of the Treasury, and later President of Harvard) and his predecessor as Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, who became a member of the Harvard Corporation Board;

These shenanigans are well documented by a series of courageous reporters and market commentators, including Anne Williamson, Greg Palast, Kelly O’Meara, William Murphy, and Chris Sanders.

This tapeworm operates globally. It has been winning at economic warfare because those opposed to it cannot see it clearly and are not yet networked globally to move people, places, and capital out of its reach. My pastor, Bishop Alfred Owens, says, “If we can face it, God can fix it.” Indeed, divine authority is hamstrung, waiting for the necessary global networks to align around a common map of the real deal about global consolidation of economic and political power – and the resulting liquidation of wealth.

This tapeworm is managed tightly by the cartels that syndicate around central banking and warfare, and it has four phases:

**Phase One – Break It:** Private syndicates make money destroying a place through organized crime, covert operations, warfare or comparable means;

**Phase Two – Buy It:** The profit generated from breaking it is used to buy or seize “legal control” at a discount;

**Phase Three – Fix It:** Government funding, credit, and subsides are then used to “fix it” while harvesting remaining assets, through narcotics trafficking, sex slavery, and any other form of liquidating the human, intellectual, environmental, and physical capital in place;

**Phase Four – Declare Victory:** “Victory” is then declared and a flow of foundation and academic grants funded by the “break it-fix it” profits generate awards, photo opportunities, and official archives and documentations for the perpetrators to be admired for bringing advanced civilization to the natives.

What emerges from an investment banker’s analysis of transactions involved in situation after situation, in place after place, year after year, is surprisingly simple.

We are watching a global first world economy that has a negative return on investment.

For example, in 1997 I lead an analysis of U.S. federal expenditures and credit activities in the Philadelphia area for a group of U.S. pension fund leaders. After analysis of the detailed data resulting from $10 billion of government re-engineering and $400 billion of federal credit portfolio strategy managed by my company, the evidence was overwhelming: the federal investment in Philadelphia had a negative return on investment.

In short, government budgets were rigging profits and income for companies and people in the area. After each year of government investment, Philadelphia spent more time doing things that were fundamentally not productive, and so had been paid to grow “stupider.”

The deterioration in environment, culture, infrastructure, and quality of life in Philadelphia that was obvious from walking around the city matched the numbers rather than the spin in the corporate news that the economy was doing well. Equity yields were falling steadily, and only cooked government and corporate books could make it look otherwise. The primary thing on the rise was the smugness of the leaders of Philadelphia institutions as their success at covert management and personal “personnel benefits” grew ever stronger.

That Giant Sucking Sound: The Tapeworm Consumes Global Capital

Another way of saying this is that the banking and corporate model as currently constituted does not work. Banks and corporations are entirely dependent on rigged government budgets, government contracts, federal credit arbitrage, and corrupt regulation in ways that generate a negative return on investment for taxpayers. In addition, as corporations and banks become dependent on such government intervention, they become progressively less able to function in a free market. Their culture becomes progressively “soviets.”

The combination of negative returns to taxpayers and increasingly non-market-worthy private organizations is steadily lowering productivity. Add to this the increasing power of organized crime as a percentage of GNP and a determinant of who sits in power on Wall Street and Washington, and fundamental productivity does not stand a chance.

This state of affairs will go on as long as it can be financed. As long as the United States can continue to export dollars, export Treasury bills and other federally supported credit, and lead the world in global organized crime and warfare, a negative-return economy can continue.

Rather than letting markets adjust in a manner that would hold banks and corporations accountable, the central banks and military and enforcement machinery will guarantee markets by offsetting ever-less productivity with ever-greater amounts of debt and the liquidation of planetary assets – people, places, and all living things.

Which leads us to Iraq.

The Tapeworm Ransacking of Iraq

The economic desperation that lead up to the invasion of Iraq has been eloquently described by Chris Sanders of Sanders Research Associates and fits the patterns that SRA colleague John Laughland and his colleagues at the British Helsinki Human Rights Group have documented in Eastern Europe. Assuming that the patterns we have seen throughout the world apply, the tapeworm’s economic desperation will feed on Iraq as follows:

The first meal to be harvested on Iraq is the profits of invasion, from government contracts and arms trafficking to media coverage.

The second meal to be harvested on Iraq is the resulting control of assets, including gold, oil, bank accounts, and antiquities. Iraq will be stripped, shipped, or otherwise switched to new ownership. Occupiers will use Iraqi assets to leverage more debt that generates more contracts and business for the inside companies. The antiquities in Iraq and this area of the world have a special meaning and attraction for the American and British leadership networks, so don’t under estimate the value of these. The gold bugs at
LeMetropole Café reported that the Americans have captured $1 billion of gold, which was quite relevant as the New York Fed banks (particularly JP Morgan, Goldman, Citibank) are running significant short positions to suppress the gold price. Such a replenishment of their stocks (or the U.S. Treasury whom they may be trading on the account of – they usually simply move the shorts over to the taxpayers on all these types of situations) will be quite refreshing.

The third meal on Iraq to be harvested will be “occupation management.” If Eastern Europe is representative, America will partner with local and global organized crime and other intelligence agencies to significantly increase organized crime profits from the place. Attractive children will be culled from the population for shipment to Europe and other areas for sex slaver and pedophilia. Narcotics trafficking will increase as it has in Afghanistan. The award to CSC DynCorp of a $900 million sole-source contract to run police, courts, and judiciary in Iraq is an important signal. After years of research, my question is whether CSC DynCorp’s core competencies relate to enforcement infrastructure designed for places with growing financial fraud, narcotics trafficking, sex slavery and control of leadership through “control files.” These are the talents that the U.S.-based economic elites need to stripmine the assets to feed their economic desperation.

The fourth meal to be harvested on Iraq will be “fixing” it and declaring “victory.” This will involve significant government contracts to bring “Western Civilization” as defined by building those things that ensure that the assets the private corporations and investors have now acquired have the largest increase in value at no expense to themselves. A careful analysis will show expenditure ratios in the “soviets” style; that is, the U.S. government will spend much more than necessary to get anything done. The banks will acquire an entirely new market. Critical to the fixing-it phase is the financing of the occupation, with the requirement that Iraq use the U.S. dollar. We will print dollars and the Iraqis will use them. This is free financing for us. Next will come the payback to the people of the United States as it is eating into the people of Iraq. Federal accounts are missing $1.3 trillion, pension funds have been stripped by pump-and-dump stock fraud, and neighborhoods are overrun with narcotics trafficking. An increasing number of U.S. citizens have more in common with the people of Iraq than with the leadership of Wall Street and Washington.

With the takeover of American digital data by defense contractors and banks managing governmental functions, economic warfare takes on a whole new meaning. What is supposed to be private is not, as those in the know have total access. What is supposed to be transparent is private, except for those in the know who are free to use it to advantage. With total defense contractor information awareness, people can be adjusted to ensure that markets do not have to adjust.

The American tapeworm is a symptom that the central banking-warfare model that has created the supremacy of the English-speaking people since the time of Queen Elizabeth I is dying. It is dying not because it is wrong but because it is weak. It is dying because – like a tapeworm – it has begun to create a rapidly weakening system.

Hence it is incumbent upon the English-speaking people to reinvent themselves by engaging globally to invent a new model. Yet the opportunity to move to a new model requires the ability to see where we are, and to outline a hopeful alternative vision. Doing so becomes progressively more important, as who is in charge is less important than how many of us are dependent for our bread and butter on a negative return on investment economy as it tapeworms its way towards planetary extinction – and all of us with it.

In short, the primary problem is not that the folks in charge are centralizing wealth in a destructive way or that some have too much money. That’s a problem, but a secondary one. The problem is that from the point of view of the dolphins, the plants, and the trees, the planet is worse off for the presence of humans.

All solutions are found when we realize that this is something you and I can correct without wasting more time trying to find someone in charge of the tapeworm, to persuade them to change its ways. It can’t change; it is too busy finding food to feed all of us.

Where is the Tapeworm’s Brain?

The great mystery in all of this is who is really in charge. On one hand, we are watching an official action of the U.S. governmental apparatus. On the other hand, that governmental apparatus is now run by the private companies and banks that operate its accounts and systems and finance its ever-growing debts. The investors behind these entities are global, not American.

This is not a picture of a sovereign government or leaders loyal to the American people. A review of global insurance risk positions, debt, and capital markets would show more about who is managing what than American politics. Indeed, Greg Palast of the BBC has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Bush lost the 2000 election – something of no practical consequence thanks to the Supreme Court and the corporate media.

The tapeworm is in control and eating into the people of the United States as it is eating into the people of Iraq. Federal accounts are missing $1.3 trillion, pension funds have been stripped by pump-and-dump stock fraud, and neighborhoods are overrun with narcotics trafficking. An increasing number of U.S. citizens have more in common with the people of Iraq than with the leadership of Wall Street and Washington.

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nourishment and humanity out of farming and replaced it with a streamlined industrial process. Petroleum-based synthetic fertilizers took the place of on-farm manures and allowed for nutrient-intensive hybrid seeds; pesticides supported monoculture cropping patterns; the routine use of antibiotics and growth hormones promoted high-density feedlots and confinement rearing of animals; machines replaced people. More recently G.M.O.s, synthetic hormones and irradiation have further distanced food from its natural origins.

Food became a commodity: cheap, abundant, and seasonless. Flavor and nutritional integrity were sacrificed on the altar of price, appearance, and convenience. In a mad scramble to survive, neighbors valued each other’s land more than their friendships. The significant environmental costs of this new system were discounted. The social costs were hardly considered. Farming lost its innocence.

The industrial transformation of the American food supply was not an evil solely of faceless self-serving corporations, but was done with the encouragement and support of the federal and state governments and with the acquiescence of a disengaged public who saw food as little more than fuel and valued cheap, unblemished, seasonless variety over all else. In a way, business and government gave us exactly the food we asked for. If we now find ourselves with a kind of thoughtless food it is because we have been thoughtless – and careless – about it.

Like so many systems of human design, industrial food swung past its point of equilibrium, which gave rise to a counter response that came to be known as the organic food movement. Born in idealism, organic food began as small and personal expressions of a more sustainable and nurturing food-production model. For many years the model existed at the margins of the national food supply. Starting about 20 years ago, however, organic food gained more public acceptance and began a steady rise to prominence. Today organic food is the fastest-growing sector of the food industry – a fact that has not been lost on “Big Food,” the large, often multi-national corporations that control a great deal of what the world eats.

Ironically, though perhaps not surprisingly, organic’s success is now compromising its future. Now in the big time, organic’s production, processing, and distribution systems are mimicking its non-organic conventional counterparts.

Organic food is being industrialized

Large fields are all but mono-cultured; “free-range” poultry range on barn floors shared by 20,000 birds; labor conditions on vast irrigated fields in the American southwest echo those of conventional counterparts. Farming lost its innocence.

The organic food model, be it conventional or organic, is failing us. With its long distances from farm to plate, it is failing our environment. With its reliance on “cheap at all costs” it is failing our farmers. With its concentrated processing plants, it is failing our safety. With its ever more exotic chemicals and processes exempt from labeling, it is failing to be transparent. And with its problematic residues and narrow views of soil fertility it is failing our nutritional needs.

‘Localvore’ logic

Food is important. What we eat and how it is grown intimately affects our health and the wellbeing of the world.

Good, nutritious food is not a luxury. It is essential, and related to all that we hold dear.

What is needed, in my view, is a more local and regional perspective on food. “Localvore” – as this cuisine has been called – is based on the logic of eating locally.

I think the best food you can eat comes from your own garden. Following this would be food that is grown and raised in small farms in your area or region. CSAs, farm stands, and farmers markets are great sources of these foods.

One of the peculiarities of food is that it does not scale well. That is it is hard to maintain food quality and integrity with ever-increasing volumes.

In the same way there is a difference between a batch of Grandma’s homemade cookies and cookies that are churned out 10,000 an hour in some distant factory there is also a difference between vegetables from a five-acre plot and those from a 5,000-acre corporate farm. And there is a difference between milk and milk products that come from a small herd of animals who pasture outdoors and are called in by name and a 3,000-head herd confined 24/7 to a concrete barn.

If we are to have better food, the kind we truly need, we need better farming. The solution is not a few mega-farms; it is many small successful farms. Many farms imply many farmers. Currently less than 1 percent of Americans make their living in agriculture. Never before have so few tried to feed so many. How did this happen? It’s simple really. People stopped farming because farming stopped paying. And this is where you and I come in.

There are people willing to farm if only they felt confident there would be buyers of their work.

We are their customers.

If we truly want to have better, cleaner food, if we want to help conserve open areas and agricultural land bases, if we want to lessen the environmental footprint of our food supply, if we care about the dignity of our neighbors who farm –

BUY THEIR FOOD!

By getting more money into local farmers’ pockets we will make local farming more viable. And while we’re at it:

• Give ‘em a wave and smile and say thanks
• Don’t quibble about the price; good, locally grown food is always worth it
• Advocate for public institutions to buy Vermont food
• Ask your favorite markets and restaurants to carry more local foods
• Join a CSA. Take seriously the farmers markets and farm stands.
• And finally, ask your elected officials to review policies and regulations that do not protect organic farmers from G.M.O. pollen drift and that restrict or prohibit farmers’ rights to sell directly to the public.

To this last point there are many regulations that restrict farm-gate (farmer-to-public) sales. Most of these regulations revolve around animal products (raw milk and meat) and are couched in the language of public health and safety. Upon closer inspection, however, these concerns are antiquated, not scientifically based, and inconsistent. The rules are slanted against small farmers and they are more properly understood as crutches for the industrial food model. Farming is a tremendously hard way to make a living and it is shameful that small farmers are yoked to such burdensome rules. Although there are ways around the rules, they all ultimately are illegal and therefore criminalize the very people who are responsible for some of the most interesting, flavorful, nutritious, and sustainable food produced in Vermont. This is fundamentally wrong. Far from being criminal, the work of our farmers is noble and deserving of our highest praise and respect.

A public gesture

Over the past several years well-intentioned and reasonable citizens have petitioned state government for farm-gate relief without success. Further, with disregard for the will of the Vermont Senate and House, the governor has vetoed the Farmer Protection Act which would have held responsible the corporate manufacturers of G.M.O. seeds for any damage or trespass. G.M.O. pollen might inflict on non-G.M.O. fields.

For these reasons, and at risk to our financial security and personal liberty, American Flatbread scheduled an event to openly and publicly serve chicken raised and farm processed by our neighbor and friend Hadley Gaylord. The “Chicken Event” was designed as a special bake on Friday June 16, 2006. Included in the evening were two short films to be shown at The Inn at Lareau Farm, and an address by noted Vermont farmer Doug Flack.

American Flatbread is committed to the rule of law and to responsible citizenship. When government promulgates laws that do not serve the public interest it is the obligation and responsibility of the citizens to promote constructive change. This public act of civil disobedience was designed as a show of support of local agriculture, to offer the most sustainably produced food to our customers we are able, and to stimulate a conversation in our community and across our state about our food stories: Where did it come from? How was it grown, and by whom? How was it stored or processed? What’s in it? What’s not? And maybe most important: What of the future of our food?

For more information about how to support or access local foods go to www.vermontlocalvore.org, or join the Mad River Valley Localvore chapter.

These words were written with the encourage ment of many, though I alone am responsible for their content. I know that there are some who worry for the wellbeing of Flatbread or for their own reputations. Please know I worry, too. I fear regulatory sanctions, public ridicule, and/or financial ruin (though I think all of these possibilities are remote). But more than these I fear a thoughtless acceptance of a food system that is not serving us well and surely will not well serve our children.
Financial Independence – For Us Common Folk

By Jane Dwinell

What would you do with your life if you didn’t have to work for money? I faced this compelling question 13 years ago. I didn’t have an answer. Sure, it would be nice to travel, spend more time with the family, and all that, but what would I do – actually do with my time – if I didn’t have to work for money?

I let go of the question, and I focused on another one: What is “enough”? That is, how much “stuff” – material goods – was enough for me, and my family? How many services did we need to pay for, and how many could we handle ourselves?

It was another big question that began to shape my life.

In the meantime, I followed a process that allowed me to answer these questions. I began to keep track of every cent my family spent and took in, what we spent it on, and then asked the question – is this purchase in alignment with our values? After having considered what our “real” hourly wage was (it’s not what’s on your paycheck), I could also figure how many hours of our life energy we spent to acquire that good or service.

Does this sound complicated? Does it sound intriguing? It’s all part of a nine-step program called “Your Money or Your Life” (YMOYL), presented in a 1992 book of the same title written by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. This book changed my life.

In our busy, consumer society, it seems that so many of us just go along with our lives without taking time to consider if what we’re doing, and how we spend our money, is in alignment with our values. I thought my family lived a pretty simple, honest life. We gardened and raised a good share of our food. We lived off the grid with solar power. Both adults were committed to working part time so that one of us would be home with our child. It turns out that by examining our life by following the nine steps, we were able to achieve Financial Integrity, Financial Intelligence, and Financial Independence.

Here are the steps:

Step 1: Making Peace with the Past
In this step, you look at how much money you have brought in over your whole life, and what your current “balance sheet” is. Figuring out your assets and liabilities is more than adding up the worth of your house, your car, and your savings, minus your mortgage, loans, and credit card debt. It’s also counting everything you own, and determining the worth of all that stuff should you sell it tomorrow in a yard sale or on eBay. This is a very enlightening step. It’s the first step toward Financial Independence.

Step 2: Being in the Present – Tracking Your Life Energy
Now it’s time to figure out your “real hourly wage.” Determine your gross weekly or yearly income, and then deduct all the expenses that you incur with your paid work (weekly or yearly). This includes commuting costs, wardrobe, meals, the alcohol or drugs you use to wind down, the vacations you have to take to de-stress, the visits to the massage therapist or the psychologist or your health care practitioner to clear up “problems,” and the time it takes to do all these things. Do the math, and discover your real hourly wage. It’ll be a wake-up call, for sure. If you’re self-employed or your income is erratic, you’ll have to be creative in figuring this out.

Once you’ve done that, it’s time to keep track of every cent that comes into or goes out of your life. Not everyone is a numbers-cruncher, and this step is a stickler for many. It may take you several months to figure out a system that works for you and your family. I’ve been doing it for 13 years, and my system has evolved over time. It can be done, and it is the centerpiece of the program.

Step 3: Where Is It All Going?
In this step you take all those monthly figures that you’ve got written on scraps of paper, Post-it notes, or index cards, and tabulate them. Create your own monthly balance sheet with income and expenses in categories that work for your situation. You’ll want categories for housing, transportation, food, health care, other services, and material goods. You can make each category as general or as specific as you want.

Once you know total expenses, you can then determine how many hours of life energy (via your “real hourly wage”) that it took for you to buy all that stuff.

Is this how you want to spend your life?

Step 4: Three Questions That Will Transform Your Life
Once you know how many hours of your life energy it took to get your food, take care of your car, keep a roof over your head, and find time for some fun, ask yourself these three questions about each category of expenditures:

Did I receive fulfillment, satisfaction, and value in proportion to life energy spent?

Is this expenditure of life energy in alignment with my values and life purpose?

How might this expenditure change if I didn’t have to work for a living?

Do this with total honesty. You may discover areas of your life where you clearly want to spend less of your life energy. Conversely, you may find areas where you want to spend more. Find out what is Enough for you. Now you’re building Financial Integrity.

Step 5: Making Life Energy Visible
Create a wall chart for yourself with a line for income, and a line for expenses. Make it attractive and put it in a place where you will see it every day. You’ll be watching your life change.

Step 6: Valuing Your Life Energy – Minimizing Spending
If you’re asking yourself the Three Questions, you will probably find your spending going down. Not buying stuff is a good first step. For the things you need, you can look into buying used, bartering, buying on sale, using the library, brown-bagging it, and making and repairing things yourself. There are oodles of ways to save money, and there are plenty of books on the subject. Be creative. It’s your life energy.

Step 7: Valuing Your Life Energy – Maximizing Income
Because you value your life energy, you’ll want to make sure that you’re paid what you’re worth. Negotiate with your employer or in any contract work that you do. Don’t accept a job if you’re not being paid enough (remember your “real hourly wage”). Sometimes you’ll save money by not working, by working closer to home, or at a job you love (so that you don’t have to pay for all those de-stressing activities).

Step 8: Capital and the Crossover Point
Now it gets fun. As you spend less and earn more, you will start to save money. Once you have six months of living expenses tucked away in a money market for a cushion, you can start to invest your money toward the day when you reach the Crossover Point – Financial Independence. Calculate the interest rate on your capital (using the best rate on a current Certificate of Deposit as a guesstimate), and add that line to your Wall Chart. One day your interest income will be your only income. When it reaches the same place as your expenses, you’ve reached Crossover, and you can leave your paid work.

Step 9: Managing Your Finances
As you begin to invest, you need to educate yourself about the best choices for you. This is not the time to speculate in the stock market. You want steady and secure income. The authors of YMOYL recommend investing in long-term U.S. government bonds. Not being that interested in investing in the federal government, and not trusting its security, I invest in Vermont bonds – those that finance schools, hospitals, and housing. They’re tax free, too.

Educate yourself about investments. There are many good books on the subject. Talk to others about their choices, and invest your money wisely. It’s still your life energy, and now it can give you Financial Independence.

Financial Independence gives my family the option to do paid work that we love (if we choose), volunteer in our community, and have plenty of time for family, friends, and avocations. It’s a good life, it’s a balanced life, and it’s available to anybody. Just follow the nine steps.

I’m available to mentor any Vermonters who would like to follow the YMOYL program. Email me at info@vermontrepublic.org, or call 229-4068.
Jefferson’s vision of westward expansion was to create what he called “an empire of liberty,” which meant expanding the sphere of self-governing republics, whether they formed themselves into one, two, three, or more Unions of States did not matter. This is how he thought of John Jacob Astor’s settlements in the Northwest: “Free and independent Americans, unconnected with us but by the ties of blood and interest, and employing like us the rights of self-government.” Here secession and division would have brought about a Commonwealth of American Unions, held together by trade and defense treaties and by common kinship and cultural allegiances.

In a speech before the Senate on March 1, 1825, Thomas Hart Benton bore witness to this Jeffersonian republican vision of the West. “In planting the seed of a new power on the coast of the Pacific ocean,” he said, “it should be well understood that when strong enough to take care of itself, the new Government should separate from the mother Empire as the child separates from the parent at the age of manhood.”

But it was not to be. Post-Lincolnian America would abandon the republican policy of secession and division in favor of the French Revolutionary model of a centralized “republic,” one and indivisible. Or more precisely, this was not an abandonment of the republican tradition so much as a perversion of it. The French Revolutionaries had taken certain aspects of republicanism—equality, fraternity, and sovereignty of the people, qualities that can exist only on a small scale—and mapped them onto a France of some 30 million people. They wanted an army of 180,000, the force the Republic sent into Russia numbered 600,000. Nearly the entire army perished, as the “citizens” of this newly formed mass democracy were transformed into cannon fodder. But this posed no problem, for another draft could be ordered. By the end of Napoleon’s rule, the French Republic had conscripted some 3 million troops.

As the Romans continued to use the language of republicanism as a mask of legitimacy long after the Republic had been crushed underfoot by the empire, so modern states call themselves “republics” when they have centralized more power than 18th century European monarchs could have dreamed of. The anti-republican modern state has stolen the moral goods of republicanism and covered its despotic nakedness with them. If we are ever to recover the civic virtues of republican life, in some form or other, we must begin by deconstructing the modern state’s inverted-world-use of republican language, and by unmasking the modern state as the hyper-monarchy that Tocqueville perceived it to be at its birth.

Sale continued from page 20
dughters, the states that want to follow Kyoto protocols and establish wind farms and strictly oversee organic standards wouldn’t have to follow a government that doesn’t. I’m not saying that with dissolution there would no longer be disagreements, for in no state is there probably unanimous agreement on any issue. But it would allow for the settling of a great many disputatious questions, and obviously add to the sum total of happiness thereby.

Besides, once a state, or group of states (I’d think of New England for the blues, the Confederacy for the reds), did not have to worry about the other side and could go about running things as they saw fit, those who disagreed with these policies could up and leave, and those in other states who liked them could move in. It’s all so logical. The wonder is that it isn’t happening right now across the land.

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New Poll Shows Vermont Independence Movement Leads The Nation

The 2006 Vermonter Poll recently conducted by the Center for Rural Studies of the University of Vermont indicates that the percentage of eligible Vermont voters who favor secession from the United States of America – 8 percent of those polled – could very well be the highest in the nation.

Secession is nothing new to Vermonters. On January 15, 1815, less than 25 years after Vermont became the 14th state, it joined other New England states in signing the report of the Hartford Convention in opposition to the proposal of the Secretary of War to implement a military draft for continuing the badly mismanaged War of 1812 with England. This report was nothing less than a declaration of the right to secede.

In 1928 and 1929 a quirky little Vermont literary magazine known as The Drift-Wind published a series of tongue-in-cheek articles by Arthur Patton Wallace and Vermont Country Store founder Vrest Orton calling for Vermont independence. According to Orton, the purpose of such a movement would be “to constitute an Arcadia for persons of free thought, active mind, high standards, and aspirations and cultural imagination.” Orton even drafted ‘A Declaration of Independence for Vermont.’ Chicago-based economist David Hale, who grew up in St. Johnsbury, also called for Vermont independence in a 1973 piece in The Stowe Reporter, which won the New England Press Association Award.

UVM Professor Frank Bryan and Vermont State Representative Bill Mares published The Vermont Secession Book in 1987. Three years later, seven of seven independent-minded Vermont towns, including Montpelier and St. Johnsbury, voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Union following a series of debates between Professor Bryan and Vermont Supreme Court Justice John Dooley. Then on October 11, 2003, the Second Vermont Republic, Vermont’s proactive independence movement, was launched in Glover. Two years later it sponsored the first statewide convention on secession since North Carolina voted to secede in 1861. The convention, attended by more than 300 people, was held in the House Chamber of the Vermont Statehouse.

About Vermont’s independence streak, Frank Bryan once said, “Vermont is just obstinate. We’ll do anything to be on the wrong side.”

But is Vermont, or the United States, on the wrong side?

Vermont’s idiosyncratic nature came through loud and clear in the 2006 Vermonter Poll. In a statewide random sample of more than 600 eligible voters, two-thirds of the respondents expressed the view that the U.S. government has become unresponsive to the needs of individual Vermonters. Nearly 20 percent of those sampled believe that it would be useful for the Vermont Legislature to commission a study to evaluate the economic impact of Vermont becoming an independent republic, as it was between 1777 and 1791.

How many eligible voters in Vermont actually favor secession from the Union? According to the survey, more than 8 percent of the eligible voters would opt for secession. If one extrapolates from the survey to the population of the entire state of Vermont, there could be as many as 37,000 voters who are favorably inclined towards secession.

To put this 8 percent figure in historical perspective, it is important to realize that when the 13 English colonies successfully seceded from the British Empire, only 25 percent of the colonial population actually supported secession. Furthermore, 8 percent may represent the highest percentage favoring secession of any state in the Union.

Two-and-a-half more years of the so-called war on terrorism, a foreign policy based on full-spectrum dominance, the suppression of civil liberties, and a culture of deceit, combined with skyrocketing gasoline prices and a precipitous decline in the dollar, could easily double the percentage of Vermont voters favoring secession.

Time will tell, and we will continue to organize...
The Vermont Sovereignty Declaration

Recent actions by the United States government, including the prosecution of illegal wars, the USA PATRIOT Act, the illegal rendition of "terrorist suspects," prisoner abuse and torture, citizen surveillance, violations of our constitutional rights, the suspension of habeas corpus, a foreign policy based on full spectrum dominance and imperial overstretch, and a culture of deceit have all given rise to legitimate concern that under circumstances of its own choosing, the federal government might not rule out:

- the suspension of the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights,
- the declaration of martial law,
- the militarization of civilian police functions,
- the suspension of free elections,
- the usurpation of individual property rights, or
- the negation of the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

In light of these troubling developments, the People of Vermont hereby reaffirm:

- OUR right of sovereignty,
- OUR right to nullify acts of the central government deemed to be unconstitutional,
- OUR right to secede from the Union, and
- OUR right to call a statewide Convention to decide whether or not Vermont remains in the Union.

To get involved in the Sovereignty Ad Campaign, contact:

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We support the Sovereignty Declaration!

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Seeing Red—and Seeing Blue

It doesn’t take more than a moment’s reflection to realize that the United States is not United, that is. Not on any serious political, social, economic, or cultural issue that has come before us during the past several decades.

Not even on what issues are important, or on how to solve them, or on who should tackle them.

Let’s look at them.


And the sovereign right of individual states within the union to secede peaceably.

I’ve probably left out one or two, but you get the idea. On all of the serious issues of our time, and some not so monumental, the divisions of opinion (and sometimes multiple divisions) are wide and deep and contentious. They do not break down by party affiliation especially, or age, or gender, or wealth. There is some correlation with urban/rural, but not on all the issues. They break down mostly, as the last two elections have shown, by geography: the red states vs. the blue, the South, the Prairie, and the Rockies vs. New England, Middle Atlantic, the Great Lakes, and the West Coast.

It’s not a perfect fit, of course, because presidential voters didn’t vote on all these issues, only on the candidates, and those mostly avoided taking stands or took roughly similar positions. But let me look at the red-blue divisions on a number of key issues to show part of the general pattern.

The first and most remarkable issue is slavery. Yes, and I mean pre-Civil War slavery. All of the states that permitted slavery, and the four western territories where it was not outlawed (Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, New Mexico), voted red in the 2004 election. The states and territories where slavery was illegal (and blacks generally made unwelcome, or confined to towns like Indians to reservations), voted blue, with the exception of Ohio and Indiana, and the eastern part of the Washington and Oregon territories (which became Idaho). Can there be some lingering connection?

It is certainly not that black populations voted red, for the large majority went Democratic, so is it possible that places that developed a resentment of the North and the free states in and after the Civil War still have a deep tradition, and culture, of hostility to the rest of the nation, the effete East and the Left Coast, and what they would think of as the quiche and chardonnay crowd? And they express it by voting against the party strongest in these Democratic strongholds, and the candidates from them, instead voting for Republicans who are strong in the South and the Prairie states. In fact, you could argue that they have chosen to have native sons of this area become president, regardless of party, since 1977 (Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, mindful that Reagan was a transplanted Californian).

But perhaps we should touch on more recent contentious issues. The abortion, the states that have laws protecting this right are California, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, and Washington, and the states where courts have recognized the right are Illinois and Oregon. Almost all the states with the highest rates of abortion are blue, led by New York, Delaware, and Washington, and the red states have the lowest, with Utah, Idaho, and Colorado ranked last.

Or gay marriage/unions. The only states that allow it are California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont with bills or court cases pending in New York and Rhode Island. All the other states but New Mexico have prohibitions against it, including the blue states of the Great Lakes.

Stem-cell research. The only states with laws or money supporting this is California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, with Missouri considering a proposal for it.

Power-plant emissions. States that have sued the federal Environmental Protection Agency to raise standards on CO2 pollutants are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Fuel efficiency. Not coincidentally, the same states plus California and New Jersey have also sued the EPA for tougher mileage regulations on SUVs and trucks. States that are planning to follow California’s tough new fuel standards for these vehicles are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

And on it goes. The blue states really are different. The same kinds of divisions hold true for countless other issues, ratified by poll after poll which have geographic breakdowns. The blue states, for one thing, are richer than the red—the top five states in per capita income are Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York, the bottom five are Utah, New Mexico, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Blue states pay far more to the federal government than they get in return; all the red states except Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, and Texas get more money than they put in, and in some cases (New Mexico, Alaska, West Virginia, Mississippi, North Dakota, Alabama, Virginia, and Missouri) receive more than $1.50 back for every dollar in taxes.

Blue state people marry later and have a lower divorce rate, where people in the South have a divorce rate 30 percent over the national average. Blue states have far more households with unmarried people, the most being in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, the least in Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi.

Best of all, blue states produce 95 percent of the quality wine, and drink more of it than anyone else.

But what sense does all this make? Why should such a divided country stay together? To whose advantage, except the federal politicians and the bureaucrats, and maybe the corporations that benefit from the commerce clause and uniform regulations? Is that enough? Why do we continue to live under the same governmental policies with other people who seem so dramatically different? Why do they want to keep fighting these battles? And why, when one side’s preferences win out—as at present with the red states in power in Washington—should people suffer to live under laws and regulations and directives and practices that enshrine values and beliefs that they detest?

Where is the moral, or philosophical—much less political—justification for such a system?

Isn’t it obvious that a dissolution of this absurd system would be to the advantage of all? The evangelicals wouldn’t have to live with the godless, the pro-choice people wouldn’t have to keep fighting the pro-lifers, the families frightened by homosexuality wouldn’t have to worry about “Will and Grace,” the creationists could have their intelligent and other designs all to themselves without threat of Darwinists, the people who find the Iraq war not only illegal but insane wouldn’t have to send their sons and