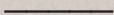


A CALL TO FARMS



Some Thoughts on Food,
Money and Nonviolence
In Honor of Wendell Berry

WOODY TASCH



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All proceeds from the sale of this book go to Slow Money Institute, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, whose mission is to catalyze grassroots flows of capital to organic farms and local food systems, nurturing new definitions of fiduciary responsibility that bring money back down to earth.

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Author's Note

The slow money movement started in 2009, with the publishing of *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered*. A robust series of public conversations, inquiries and explorations ensued, linked to quite a bit of action. Hundreds of deals, tens of millions of dollars, volunteer-led groups in dozens of locales, and too many meetings, large and small, to count. Through it all, Oscar Wilde's wisdom often comes to mind: "The whole problem with socialism is that it requires too many evening meetings." To which I always add: "Slow money is not socialism. It's a highly sociable form of capitalism." Or maybe it's something more fundamental—an expression of the desire to get beyond economic ideologies

and isms, so that we may reconnect with one another and heal in the face of existential fear, incivility and bloodshed. All of which brings us to the slender volume that follows.

—WT

I

This is a call to farms. It is and is not a response. It is not a response to any one brigade's route, the military mind that mapped it or the propaganda that is translating it into ideological talking points. It is a response to the forces that turned—lo these few brief millennia, and lo'er these few brief centuries, and lo'er yet (you'd think lo'est, surely, but no, there seems no end to the Great Acceleration) these few brief decades, these few brief tweets, these few brief algorithmic breaths, these few brief ultrafast bursts of ones and zeroes—the Fertile Crescent into the Oil Patch and amber waves of grain into food as a store of cheap, shelf-stable calories, food as fuel for internal combustion engines, food as industrial power.

This is a call to farms because there is healing to be done. Trust to be restored. Mutuality to be rekindled. Biodiversity to be valued. Conviviality to be nurtured. Carbon to be sequestered. Bread to be broken. Affection to be shared. Humility to be cultivated.

II

The overwhelming sadness I am feeling these days—witnessing the siege of Mariupol and Volodymyr’s leadership and Vladimir’s propagandizing and NATO’s struggle to respond without escalation—is deeper than generalized helplessness. There is a lifetime of barely repressed cognitive dissonance and American remorseful conscience to it. I say “barely repressed” because I’ve been

imperfectly dealing with cognitive dissonance and remorseful conscience ever since the Cuban Missile Crisis, when, as I entered adolescence, I was just old enough to sense that as the nation that developed nuclear weapons and dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a certain inevitability to the crisis we then faced in the form of Russian nuclear warheads wending their way to Cuba.

I've been mulling anew, in these current hours of war in Europe, the roots of my American cognitive dissonance. How do we reconcile the American Dream and the military industrial complex? American Exceptionalism and 393 million guns? Going to the moon and thousands of nuclear warheads? Amber waves of grain and McWorld?

McWorld. That word encapsulates, perhaps more than any other, the blithe self-assuredness with which industrial capitalism has planted its flag all over the globe. For years, McDonald's trumpeted its numbers on the Golden Arches themselves: "X" million burgers sold. They stopped putting the numbers up there in 1994, as the 100 million mark was being approached, because, observers suggest, the numbers had become so large that they were starting to be a liability in the Quantity vs. Quality School of Value Creation and Marketing.

McWorld. So enthralled have we been with the entrepreneurial success of companies with global reach that we've even wanted to believe they could represent, as Thomas Friedman wrote in 1996, a pathway to peace.

The thesis is this: No two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war against each other.

There was enough of a correlation for me to ask James Cantalupo, president of McDonald's International and its de facto Secretary of State, what might be behind this Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention which stipulates that when a country reaches a certain level of economic development, when it has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald's, it becomes a McDonald's country, and people in McDonald's countries don't like to fight wars; they like to wait in line for burgers.

McWorld. When Benjamin Barber wrote *Jihad vs. McWorld* in 1994, Jihad was not as clear to many in the West as it soon became.

We've still got a long way to go in terms of coming to grips with the implications of McWorld.

But rather than tallying what is good and what is bad in McWorld, let's look to the question of balance. Isn't it obvious enough that both McWorld and Jihad as poles, as worldviews institutionalized and ideologized in opposition to one another, do harm? Isn't it obvious that consumerism, militarism, exceptionalism and fundamentalism too easily run to the extremes?

Less obvious, but no less important, is something we can call *investorism*. This is the culture of Buy Low/Sell High, Wealth Now/Philanthropy Later taken to extreme, the culture that prioritizes transactions over

relationships, that, in Oscar Wilde's famous formulation, knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

The price of a Tomahawk missile is \$1 million. The price of a pallet of two-by-fours is \$X. A loaf of bread in Cairo costs \$Y. The price of a dose of insulin is \$Z.

We cannot get all the way to peace and health solely by being more conscious consumers, nor even by being more conscious investors—at least not so long as we understand investing to mean the anonymous trading of securities and portfolios of financial instruments that are too complex, too abstract to be fully transparent and comprehensible. That's investing 20th-century-style, courtesy of a few centuries of industrialization and corporatization and

fiduciarization. In the 21st century, we need to put some of our money, and lots of our intention, and meaningful chunks of our time, into a new kind of investing—putting money to work near where we live, in things that we understand, starting with food, not with an eye toward how much money we might make, but toward how effectively we promote cultural, ecological and economic diversity, community resilience, health and peace.

III

A call to farms. . .

What kind of poetry is this, sprouting
in the face of. . .in the face of. . .
this warfare on the Steppes,
these implosions of the impossible,

wounds of geopolitical reductionism wrought,
ruthless obliterations of all poetic ought,
dropping from the sky
as if peace were a trinket?

A call to farms in the shadow of. . .
in the shadow of. . .we do not dare to think it.

A dull inevitability accompanies wartime
punditry.
The Dnieper flows to the Black Sea.



Everything that had been taught, erased.
Every step that had been forgotten, retraced.
Every seed that had been planted, laid waste.

Tincture of treaty. Cloud of indecision.
The cancer had only been in remission.



Back in the Fifties, in countless dens of countless tract homes in countless U.S. suburbs, countless boys lay prone, playing with plastic army men in various positions, making shooting sounds, World War II in their heads in some way, fathers in their heads in some way, survival in their heads in some way, being at such a great yet minimal remove in their heads in some way, vaguely aware, but not, of being a generation removed, a continent removed, an American Dream removed, a whole that never would be whole removed, and removed again, displaced, free, victorious, unwittingly emboldened, as only those on the right side of history can be.

Elsewhere, gods and ghosts cavorted, unsure whether to celebrate or weep. Under the banner of Democracy's victory, Technology consorted with some demi-goddess or other and Nuclear Proliferation was conceived. The ghost of Stalin stalked the empty Yalta grounds. Around Gaia's slender shoulders was draped

the shroud of unlimited economic growth—
with a certain alienated majesty she wore it,
while at the banquet table, revelers shouted.

The festivities were not long-lived.
Everything was put on the market.
There were plenty of buyers.

There were as many buyers
as there were shares to be bought.
As there were battles to be fought.
As there were preachers to thunder.
As there were desks to hide under.

Then, as the millennium wound down
were myriad financial instruments sown,
the broad acreages of our non-bewilderment
receiving them without so much as a whimper.
Who knew there could be so many ways
to maximize return and minimize chance?

Scattered in fields of Ukrainian wheat,
unexploded ordnance.

IV

The thread of such concerns goes back to Thoreau and then runs to Tolstoy, Ruskin, Gandhi and E.F. Schumacher, and thence to Dana Meadows, Hazel Henderson, Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben. Greta Thunberg has picked up the banner for the next generation, calling out “fairy tales of unending economic growth.”

She reminds us that we run the risk, in railing against capitalism or against socialism, of failing to focus on those fairy tales of unending economic growth.

V

It is not as important to be against capitalism or against socialism as it is to be *for* humanism. Any economic system that belittles humans, that puts institutions and ideologies and financial abstractions ahead of people and the places where we live, is not an economic system under whose banner we should rally.

To be for humanism is to harbor a certain skepticism when it comes to consumerism, investorism, exceptionalism, fundamentalism and militarism.

This is the beauty and the subtle power of community-supported agriculture. Community-supported agriculture could be described as one part capitalism, one part socialism, two

parts localism, but such a description would belie the degree to which, in their informality and deep mutuality, CSAs constitute a kind of stand against isms altogether.

The first wave of community-supported agriculture—which grew from the first CSA in the U.S. in 1986 to some 7,000 CSAs with 600,000 members today—is an indicator. We must build on this foundation, heading toward a food system in which meaningful portions of the food supply are produced locally and regionally. How much is “meaningful”? Over time, we may arrive at a percentage. For now, we can just affirm that a few percent is not enough.

What impels us is not just the desire to know our local farmers, although knowing them is

surely a good thing. What impels us is not just the desire for fresh, toxin-free food and carbon rich soil, although these are surely goods of the highest order, too. What impels us is not just the desire to reduce the outsourcing of food production to corporations controlled by invisible shareholders, although enhancing local control of food and reducing the extent of our dependence on global supply chains is surely a worthy pursuit. What impels us is the deepest of suspicions that structural reform is needed and that it may never be possible from the top down.

When we send our money to Wall Street, Washington and Silicon Valley, it doesn't readily come back in ways that can repair the damage done by the sending.

VI

In 1968, Wendell Berry wrote the essay *Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience in Honor of Don Pratt*. Pratt had been arrested for refusing to be drafted during the Vietnam War.

I still cannot read Berry's essay without getting goose bumps. It stands next to Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. As I've already excerpted it heavily elsewhere (in Part V of *AHA!: Fake Trillions, Real Billions, Beetcoin and the Great American Do-Over*), let's just reflect on one snippet here:

No matter how sophisticated and complex and powerful our institutions, we are still exactly as dependent on the earth as earthworms. To cease to know this, and to

fail to act upon the knowledge, is to begin to die the death of a broken machine.

Perhaps some of my goose bumps derive from the narrowness of my own escape from the draft, which ended in 1973, as I was graduating from college. Or perhaps they go back further, to JFK. In 1963, several months after the Cuban Missile Crisis and a few months before he would be assassinated, President Kennedy delivered the commencement address at American University. Titled “A Strategy for Peace,” it surprised the world with a bold announcement that the U.S. would unilaterally halt atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons:

Let us examine our attitude toward peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it unreal. But that is a

dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable—that mankind is doomed—that we are gripped by forces we cannot control. We need not accept that view. Our problems are manmade—therefore, they can be solved by man.

The military industrial complex and nuclear proliferation do not have lives of their own, however much it may seem so. They are not blind forces over which we have no sway. We give them power by owing our allegiance in certain ways, by allowing our money to flow in certain ways.

We can cause our money to flow in certain other ways as well, supporting decentralization, disintermediation, deceleration and

anti-deracination (?!), a.k.a. the slow, the small and the local, not as ideological alternatives to all things global, but as practical countervailing forces, promoting balance, resilience and healing at the level of household, community and bioregion.

VII

In the mid-19th century, Thoreau dug into fundamental questions about war, conscience and where our money goes, questions that are as vital today as they were then. Reflecting on his refusal to pay federal taxes because a portion of those taxes was funding war with Mexico, he wrote:

It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of

conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined.

And then:

I do not care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a man or a

musket to shoot one with — the dollar is innocent — but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance.

Money finds its way to war. “Cast your whole vote,” Thoreau continued, “not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence.” If we bring our whole selves to the question of where our money is going, we can find ways to put it to work more peaceably.

VIII

Healing the wounds of the industrial food system is not, as a project, on the same pedestal of urgency as ending the war in Ukraine, but it is an urgent project nonetheless, and not entirely unrelated.

We are called to respond to immediate crises and to attenuate causes of future crises. This includes mitigating overreliance on global supply chains. It also means actively working to restore mutuality and trust, from the international and national levels down to the level of bioregion, community, neighborhood and household. But not necessarily in that order.

In response to military crisis, a few extraordinary souls may choose the difficult and complicated path of conscientious objection. In response to the collateral damage of globalization, the choice to become a conscientious investor is far less dramatic, far less binary, far friendlier—driven, sure, by being mad as hell and not wanting to take it anymore, but at a deeper level by a sense of conscientious affection.

IX

Civilization is an awfully fragile thing, so prone it is to institutionalized violence, all the way down to the whys and wherefores of industrial agriculture, which, if not managed with the greatest of care, damages the web of life.

No Till agriculture is a wonderfully practical thing. It aims to leave carbon in the soil and put more there, pointing us in a certain direction as to our manner of comportment in relation to the earth and the cycles of life.

Do No Harm is a gloriously noble thing, although elevating it to the level of religious dogma is a way to kill its essence as surely as any plowshare ever killed an earthworm.

X

It is generally assumed, when calling for systemic reform, that big problems require big solutions and that big solutions require large-scale government intervention. The playing field, this thinking goes, can be leveled only by the machinery of state.

It seems incontrovertible that if the job at hand is the leveling of playing fields, then bulldozers are preferable to trowels.

But what if the leveling of playing fields is not the only job at hand? What if we are also called to cultivate mutuality and trust?

XI

This is a rallying cry of the most pragmatic kind—yet not without some poetry about it.

There is nothing more pragmatic and more poetic, both, than a small, diversified organic farm. Such a farm is a supremely entrepreneurial affair and its steward must be a supremely adept entrepreneur. A community fed by supremely adept farmer–entrepreneur–stewards is a healthier community. A successful organic farm is, in its dance of biodiversity and continuous experiments in doing less harm, an affair of considerable poetic possibility.

Soil fertility, too, is an embodiment of pragmatism and poetry. It is the opposite of

reductionist, linear, mechanistic thinking. There is much that we do not know about it. The microorganisms in fertile soil are almost beyond counting; each handful contains billions of individuals and thousands of species, most of which have not yet even been studied.

It has been said by an Italian poet that wine is the poetry of the earth; the same may be said for fertility. Fertility is the soil's imaginative expression of harmonious coexistence. (That's not nearly as pithy, but then nothing can touch an Italian poet opining about wine.)

XII

Poetry is the sweet nothings whispered
by Rhyme in Reason's ear
by Ecology in Economy's ear
by Aphrodite in Apollo's ear
by Wendell in Tanya's ear.

From such sweet nothingry
do somethingries shoot,
allowing possibility and peace to bloom.
For a few precious moments,
even the dullest root, though damaged
by war's cruelest winter, finds ways to stir
according to the seasons.

XIII

“There is the battle on the ground,” comments a BBC reporter in Kyiv, “and then there is the battle for the narrative.” In the information age, information is weaponized.

So is money. The trading mentality invades all spheres of culture. Abstract financial instruments and complex intermediation schemes attack self-worth. Investment banker Felix Rohatyn once described derivatives as “financial hydrogen bombs built on computers by 24-year-olds with MBAs.” Warren Buffett describes them as “financial weapons of mass destruction.”

Through this war and that, from military war to class warfare, we remain governed by the

same economic narrative. This is the story of the Industrial Revolution, technological innovation and globalization. It is also the story of giving our money to people we don't know very well, to invest in things we and they don't understand very well, in enterprises located in places we will never visit. So long as the economy keeps growing and the stock market keeps going up, we are content relegating the stubbornest systemic problems to the realm of financial footnotes.

What will be the final narrative of *Homo economicus*? That we never found a way beyond war? That we continued pursuing technological haste and generating industrial waste, ad infinitum? Or that we found a different path, a path to healing, ultimately doing what no other species has ever done or

could do—using our symbolic reasoning to self-limit and coexist?

XIV

We bear witness to the roots of war, the invasion of *philia* by *sapiens*, the shadow of Mutually Assured Destruction, Means destroying Ends, electronic connectivity that disconnects us, intolerance fueled by religious doctrine that promotes love, petrochemicals insinuating themselves into every aspect of life and making pollution an economic necessity, and then there are all those -cides: genocides, biocides, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, the rationales of agribusiness applied, the laws of economics applied, and through it all, the erosion of soil and community, despite

and because of the greatest accumulations of wealth in history, despite and because of the greatest technological advances in history, despite and because of the greatest transmissions of information in history. Signals barely get through from the History Repeating Itself Department of History Repeating Itself and the Too Much of a Good Thing Department of Consumer Confidence and Confounding.

Against such far-reaching systemic forces and the confusion they engender, small diversified organic farms and local food systems seem wildly ineffectual responses. But they are not, any more than a seed is inconsequential due to its diminutive size. The only question is how many we can save and share and grow out for next year's harvest.

XV

Perhaps it is historical coincidence that NPK fertilizer was brought to market after WWII by munitions manufacturers and that pesticides were derived from lethal military gas, or perhaps it is a cosmic clue. The industrial, command-and-control mindset that brings us confined animal feeding operations, meat laced with antibiotics, genetically modified organisms and vast acreages of monoculture is the same mindset that brings us Mutually Assured Destruction.

Mutually Assured Destruction. It's hard to write a sentence that comes after these three words, these words that make the gloomiest of acronyms. Surely there must be another way.

“I think of what I’m doing as biological diplomacy,” says Eliot Coleman, describing his work as an organic farmer.

Which might seem to have nothing whatsoever to do with Mutually Assured Destruction until Eliot continues: “If, in this most basic of human endeavors, agriculture, we can learn to live in harmony with biological limits of the planet, then we can similarly learn, on the plane of human existence, to live in harmony with ourselves.”

XVI

We build machines to sequester atmospheric carbon. We develop microbes that eat microplastic. We head to Mars. We steer trillions

of dollars this way and that. We hope to avoid unintended consequences. But technology cannot substitute for culture, any more than artificial intelligence can substitute for judgment. Any more than *away* can substitute for *here*. Any more than there has ever been a catchphrase: “Think globally. Act virtually.”

Our hearts and minds are a battleground where two ways of seeing the world clash.

Camp One. If you believe that scientific advance and entrepreneurial creativity are engines of continued improvement of the human condition—and that lack of faith in the capacity of technological innovation to overcome obstacles is a greater problem than the obstacles themselves—then economic growth and profit-maximizing remain the *sine qua non* of progress.

Camp Two. If you believe that indefinite expansion of consumption on a finite planet is a physical impossibility and that there is a point of diminishing returns for cleverness and know-how, beyond which long-term ills begin piling up faster than short-term gains, then economic growth and profit-maximizing are no longer synonymous with progress.

In this struggle between worldviews, food is Ground Zero. A small diversified organic farm is a demilitarized zone.

XVII

Ground Zero. Square one. Mobius strip. Feedback loop. Carbon cycle. Moore's law. Exponential growth. P/E ratio. Squaring

the circle. A circular economy. π . Oh, most definitely π , that infinitely irrational symbol of a circle's area made.

Infinite irrationality must be irrational exuberance's distant cousin. "How do we know when irrational exuberance has unduly escalated asset values?" Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan once famously asked.

How do we know?

How do we know when irrational technoutopianism is unduly upending the social order? How do we know when irrational pecuniary ingenuity is unduly cryptoing everything that can be cryptoed? And how, pray tell, do we know when it's time to listen less to global financiers and more to local farmers?

XVIII

You would think that when agriculture enabled permanent settlement 10,000 years ago, it would have put us on the path toward the culture of taking care of the places where we live. Oddly, though, it seems to have ushered us, in an epochal blink of an eye, straight from the nomadism of hunter-gathering to the nomadism of cyberspace. Along the way, plantation agriculture and industrial agriculture have been spectacularly successful at enabling urbanization and the mass production of cheap commodities, but at incalculable costs of slavery and exploitation, environmental degradation, and diet-related disease and ill-health.

And now here we are, in year 10,001,
working toward a new vision of agriculture
and culture.

Or should we say 1915? In that year, with
World War I raging, Liberty Hyde Bailey,
founder of the Cornell School of Agriculture,
wrote in *The Holy Earth*:

Farmers know how diverse are the forms
of life; and they know that somehow these
forms live together and that only rarely do
whole races perish by subjugation. They
know that the beasts do not set forth to
conquer, but only to gain subsistence and
to protect themselves. The beasts and birds
do not pursue indiscriminately. A hen-hawk
does not attack crows or butterflies. Even
a vicious bull does not attack fowls or
rabbits or sheep. The great issues are the

issues of live and let-live. There are whole nations of plants, more unlike than nations of humankind, living together in mutual interdependence. There are nations of quiet and mightless animals that live in the very regions of the mighty and the stout. And we are glad it is so.

Consider the mockery of invoking the struggle for existence as justification for a battle on a June morning, when all nature is vibrant with life and competition is severe, and when, if ever, we are to look for strife. But the very earth breathes peace. The fullness of every field and wood is in complete adjustment. The teeming multitudes of animal and plant have found a way to live together, and we look abroad on a vast harmony, verdurous, prolific, abounding. Into this concord, project your holocaust!

He addressed, as well, more subtle forms of violence done to traditional patterns of living and culture by the modern economy:

To farm well; to provide well; to produce it oneself; to be independent of trade, so far as this is possible in the furnishing of the table,—these are good elements in living. And in this day we are rapidly losing all this; many persons already have lost it; many have never known the satisfaction of it. Most of us must live from the box and the bottle and the tin-can; we are even feeding our cattle from the factory and the bag. The farmer now raises a few prime products to sell, and then he buys his foods in the markets under label and tag; and he knows not who produced the materials, and he soon comes not to care. No thought of the seasons, and of the men and women who labored, of the place, of the kind of soil, of the special contribution of the native earth,

come with the trademark or the brand. And so we all live mechanically, from shop to table, without contact, and irreverently.

Bailey was writing many decades before farms would become factories, before petrochemicals and supermarkets and global supply chains would dominate food systems, before organic farming and holistic livestock management and soil carbon would begin to be understood as tools for ecological healing. He saw the problems of agriculture not so much as technical problems to be fixed as elements of the overall health of society; we weren't just losing our respect for the soil, but for one another.

A century later, we are still early in the process of reckoning with the erosion of

mutuality and trust and the consequences of living “without contact.” Some of us seek remedy in *slow food*, celebrating food tradition and indigenous culture. Some of us, in *slow money*—an alternative to money zooming around the planet, free, in its invisibility, to do who knows what kind of harm to who knows whom, to who knows which remnant of which rain forest, to who knows which acre of soil.

XIX

Mutuality and trust have always been a particular problem for this nation of refugees, pioneers, settlers, colonists, revolutionaries, traders, miners, entrepreneurs, laborers, robber barons, campaigners, protestors and

speculators. Our dogged—many thought divinely inspired—determination to throw off the yoke of monarchy and enshrine democracy was matched only by the stubbornness with which we refused to recognize the soul-crushing cultural contradictions inherent in our decimation of Native Americans and enslavement of Africans. We put “In God We Trust” on our money. We became an economic superpower. In a few centuries, the land of “people of the corn” had become the land of corn syrup.

Should we be surprised by the resulting culture of denial? By the rapidity with which *caveat emptor* took some of us straight past GO but landed all of us in jail? By the bitterness of the feuding between Cracker Barrelites and Whole Foodies? By

the zeal with which, before the ink on the story of bailout, collapse and quantitative easing has even dried, we've begun chasing cryptocurrency?

We are constantly reinventing our rootlessness, each new realm of trading as inexhaustible as the New World to European settlers.

XX

In 1600, when the Dutch East India Company financed ships to set out from Amsterdam, Apple and Amazon were beyond imagining. In 1700, Native American reservations were beyond imagining. In 1800, the modern plow and steam-powered tractor were beyond imagining. In 1900, a billion cars and 8 billion

people and climate change were beyond imagining. In 2000, the prospect of the first Black president was almost beyond imagining.

Today, the idea that nodes of mutuality and trust could proliferate in the wake of financialization and fundamentalism, that Making a Living could one day hold its own against Making a Killing, isn't quite beyond imagining.

XXI

Someday, Mariupol may be rebuilt. There will be many jobs created in the rebuilding, much money to be spent, earned and made, just as there was much money spent, earned and made in the manufacture of

the munitions and the military systems that were used to destroy Mariupol. But not even a mad economist would construe these as arguments in favor of war. Similarly, one should not argue that wealth creation is, in and of itself, always good, nor that the prospect of using wealth to fund philanthropy and public works is an argument in favor of enshrining consumer confidence, economic growth, war or patriarchy, simply because they generate wealth.

XXII

From the Russian Revolution to the Green Revolution, from the War to End All Wars to the War on Poverty, our quivers are full of industrial-strength, 20th-century arrows that

can't quite hit the bull's-eye in the Age of Greta. Maybe it's because we're shooting at the wrong target.

“If the lad or lass is among us who knows where the secret heart of this Growth Monster is hidden,” writes poet Gary Snyder, referring to the global economy's pursuit of unlimited growth, “let them please tell us where to shoot the arrow that will slow it down.”

The crazy-good news is that many, many such lads and lasses are, indeed, among us, living near and far. Eliot Coleman, Zoe Bradbury, Karen Washington, Will Harris, Ann Cure, Jill and Eric Skokan, Evan Mallett, Dan James, Linley Dixon, Jean-Martin Fortier, Shi Yan and 石嫣 博士 (Shared Harvest outside Beijing), Pat's Pastured, Wild Plum

Café, Organic Valley, Hawthorne Valley, Organically Grown Company, Veritable Vegetables, Red Tomato, Our Table Cooperative, Central Grazing Company, Terre de Liens, Food Connect Brisbane, Savory Institute, Real Organic Project, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Farm Fresh RI, **עֵזְבֵּייר** (Citytree Tel Aviv), Farmworks Investment Co-op in Nova Scotia, Swanton Berry Farm, Full Belly Farm, MijnStadstuin (MyUrbanGarden Amsterdam), Thirteen Mile Lamb & Wool Company, Soul Fire Farm, Lucky Penny Farm, Butterworks Farm—trying to name all these farmers and food entrepreneurs in one place would be as silly as the idea of an institutional investment fund targeting them, aiming to generate competitive returns for distant investors. If we've had trouble learning this hitherto,

let us learn it now. With respect to many commercial enterprises that are foundational to our well-being, our sense of purpose and our sense of belonging, the returns that must come first in the 21st century are the returns to soil and air and water and community, here, in the places where we live. Such returns are not delivered by cyber heroes offering buckets of virtual gold. They are brought to us by those who put their hands into the soil—the actual soil and the soil of the local economy.

Nell Newman knows. That's why she used to tell her dad, "In life, we need to be more like the farmer who puts back into the soil what he takes out." Newman's Own charted a way forward in the postmodern economic journey by dedicating 100% of profits to charity.

They've given away \$570 million since 1982. In a much, much smaller way, but no less holistic in intention, local volunteer-led slow money SOIL groups have recently begun giving 0% loans to organic farmers and food businesses.

“I've never had this much fun doing anything that involves money,” said Jason Griffiths of Aspen Moon Farm as he left the room where 40 folks had just approved his \$30,000 0% loan. There may be nothing more wonderfully, apolitically, radically constructive and hopeful than the fact that we all knew what Jason meant by *fun*. His smile was lively serious. For a few moments, we shared glimpses of *nurture capital*, although we did not yet know it by name.

Before you dismiss such talk, in this time of global wheat supplies disrupted by war, as the musings of someone who has eaten at too many farm-to-table restaurants for his own good, consider this: A well-run, small, diversified organic farm can generate \$50,000 or more per acre in revenue, while industrial monocultures of grain grown in multi-thousand-acre swaths generate something like \$1,000 per acre in revenues from their commodity crop. Small is not only beautiful; it can also be extremely productive. But let's zoom out from the numbers as quickly as we zoomed in, because there are many ins and outs to them, and the numbers tell only a part of the story.

The rest will be told by the growing number of folks who know in their hearts that we

can never bomb our way to peace, any more than we can manufacture soil fertility in a petri dish or financially engineer our way to mutuality and trust.

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The question before us, then, is not only how we will mobilize to redress the immediate harm done by the current militarism and violence. The question is also how we will plant the seeds of a peaceable economy. There is no more fundamental place to start than with how we grow food, how we feed ourselves and one another, how we relate to and care for the land.

Ancient tribal antipathies and modern geopolitical ambitions run deep, and the centrifugal forces of money and data and conspiracy theories zooming around the planet are great, but they must not absorb the whole of our attention, preventing us from preparing the ground for what comes next.

Let us nurture a great awakening of local conscientiousness, a great coming together in communities and watersheds and foodsheds around the world, so that what Slow Food's Carlo Petrini calls "virtuous globalization" can sink deep, perennial roots into a complementary process of virtuous localization.

Let us march forthrightly in the direction of, with conscientious affection and gumption

for the ages, the vision of millions of individuals in thousands of communities around the world, bringing money back down to earth, restoring and preserving local food systems and soil fertility, in the name of resilience, health and peace.

Woody Tasch is founder of the Slow Money Institute and Beetcoin.



Afterword

*Remarks delivered at the inaugural Call To Farms event,
September 11, 2022*

We are here, today, lending our voices to a conversation about what's broken and what we can do to fix things from the ground up. More than 400 of us from a dozen countries, celebrating the launch of beetcoin and our emerging family of 0% loan groups.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all who've made the first decade of the slow money movement so successful. More than \$80 million has flowed to over 800 small organic farms and local food businesses via volunteer-led efforts in dozens of communities. Volunteer led. No centralized fund. No one investment technique or instrument—although the vast majority of the funding

was in the form of below market loans. 3%.
5%. Going to folks who likely wouldn't have
access to bank financing at any cost and often
who don't have the wherewithal or the desire
to apply for government programs. Flowing
relatively informally, in a way that can truly
be called grassroots.

For my part, and I know I speak for many
others, this has been a beautiful process to be
a part of. Beautiful and. . . beautifully ineffi-
cient. Purposefully inefficient.

That word, *inefficient*, is a loaded one. As is
its opposite, efficient.

To the entire discipline of modern economics,
efficient markets are axiomatic.

In pursuit of efficiency in all spheres, we've become a nation of fast food, ultra-fast trading, instantaneous information and fast internet-enabled fear mongering.

The problem isn't that modern economics doesn't work. The problem is that it works too well. It doesn't know where to stop. It doesn't have a way of valuing *enough*. We have surrounded ourselves with myriad expressions of efficiency and they have fostered unprecedented economic growth and wealth creation, albeit distressingly and increasingly unequal in their distribution. We have achieved efficiency courtesy of awe-inspiring technological prowess, but with it has come enormous mounting social and ecological costs.

Three days ago, the day of Queen Elizabeth's passing, the United Nations published its latest Human Development Report. It opens this way:

We live in a world of worry. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, having driven reversals in human development in almost every country, continues to spin off variants unpredictably. War in Ukraine and elsewhere has created more human suffering. Record-breaking temperatures, fires, storms and floods sound the alarm of planetary systems increasingly out of whack.

Uncertainty is not new, but its dimensions are taking ominous new forms today. A new "uncertainty complex" is emerging, never before seen in human history. Constituting it are three volatile and interacting strands: the destabilizing planetary pressures

and inequalities of human impact on climate, the pursuit of sweeping societal transformations to ease those pressures, and widespread and intensifying polarization.

On the report's site, a short video states, "We must re-examine our assumptions" and "chart a new course."

Interestingly, a very similar thought was also expressed the next day by the Archbishop of Canterbury, discussing the impact of the Queen's passing: "This is a moment for us to reflect on our values, on what kind of society we want to be and, perhaps, to reset our coordinates." Perhaps those new coordinates would set us on the very same new course called for by the UN report.

Whatever one thinks of the British monarchy, few can fail to honor the personal example of Queen Elizabeth's dignity, grace, service and civility. We can all wonder whether some of the new coordinates we seek aren't yet to be found in such time-tested values as these.

Civility. Civil society. They're disappearing faster than Amazon rainforest.

We're all too ready to retreat into our own individual silos, clicking away in isolation, watching, buying, trading information that is impossible to trust, much less verify, information riddled with anonymity and all manner of commercial and political intent.

Yet we keep plugging in, because we enjoy immediate access to stuff and we want to be

“informed.” I suppose this is the kind of consumer, the kind of “informed citizenry” we become in the age of efficiency.

Maybe we’ve allowed ourselves to become so intent on receiving and sending and consuming that we’ve lost sight of time-tested values. What E.F. Schumacher called “meta-economic” values. Which is another way of wondering whether we believe, any longer, that virtue really is a thing in the 21st century, whether virtue might yet be, sometimes, not unlike the pen, mightier than the sword.

At the end of *A Call To Farms*, I included Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini’s term “virtuous globalization.” This term suggests the question: Can globalization long endure

if it is built at the expense of local food communities, indigenous culture and biodiversity? Other questions loom behind that one: What does “virtuous” mean in the 21st century? Can virtue survive the superstorms, the wildfires, the rising tide of clicks? Is there any industrial solution so perfect, any financial system so elegant in design, that the virtues of mutuality, diligence, moderation and civility are no longer necessary?

A few years ago, Stanley Crawford, who farms one acre of garlic in northern New Mexico and who’s been eloquently writing about organic farming and local food for many years, authored *The Garlic Papers*, revolving around a lawsuit in which he became entangled with the largest dumper of Chinese garlic into the U.S. market. Crawford writes:

“In an era of increasingly complex forms of internet-enabled dependencies, a small farm is no small thing.” I love that. Let’s stop for a second and think on it. . .

Crawford continues, “A working farm is a sanctuary from the gravitational forces of the twenty-four-hour news cycle and social media trying to pull you away from a place-centered life, luring you to click your way out into the void.”

OK. That’s a lot. The void. Virtue. Efficient markets. The uncertainty complex.

King Charles to the rescue!! No, really. Well, more accurately, Prince Charles. In 2011, he delivered a speech in the U.S., “On the Future of Food.” In it, he summarized the

many virtues of organic farming, how it addresses the ecological and health problems caused by industrial agriculture—erosion, nutrient run-off, dead zones, confined animal feeding operations, junk food, antibiotics, petrochemicals, too much carbon in the atmosphere and not enough in the soil. But it is not on any of these ecological and health matters that I want to focus the remainder of these remarks, as I know there is a high degree of consensus about these matters among us. A high degree of consensus.

It's interesting. King Charles' 2011 speech revolved around just this—consensus:

The new food movement could be at the heart of a new consensus, acting as an agent for truly transformational change. . . . Such a new consensus might embrace the

willingness of all aspects of society—the public, private, and NGO sectors, large corporations and small organizations—to work together to build an economic model built upon resilience and diversity.

Now *there's* a vision. An economic model built upon resilience and diversity. An economic model that, in addition to valuing the latest and greenest agricultural technologies and the best large-scale agroecological practices, also, in the King's words, "Nurtures and supports the communities of smallholders and family farmers."

If we give ourselves over to thinking that big problems can only be solved by big solutions, we'll fall into the trap of pitting OUR "big ideas" against THEIR "big ideas." We'll give

all our energy to big fights against vested interests. We'll rally under the flag of capitalism in its competition with socialism or rally under the flag of McWorld in its fight against Jihad. Without necessarily getting at many of the structural problems of industrialization and techno-utopianism.

That framing—Jihad vs. McWorld—is the title of a prescient 1985 book by Benjamin Barber. It's a real eye-opener with respect to the roots of historical forces whose grips we are still in, making it all the harder for us to set those new coordinates, to chart a new course. *Jihad vs. McWorld*. Cultural imperialism. Terrorism. Militarism. Populism. The shadow side of globalization and the uncertain prospects for democracy.

So, here we are, on 9/11, in the shadow of all these problems, problems brought to the fore in new ways, or perhaps we should say in the oldest of ways, by the war in Ukraine. We've come together to share thoughts about food, money and nonviolence, to lay the groundwork for meaningful, constructive action.

The success of our efforts, of our ability to diminish our complicity in systemic violence and head in the direction of a peaceable economy built around resilience and diversity, depends on our ability to restore mutuality and trust. Mutuality and trust strong enough to weather the powerful corrosive forces of today's "uncertainty complex." Strong enough to transcend the current economic conventional wisdom, which is

trapped in a kind of perpetual adolescence—thinking more is always better, recognizing no limits to growth, to speed, to technological prowess, and, certainly, at the very least, we can say, promoting a way of approaching the world that is disastrously deficient in humility and civility.

Ours, then, is an exercise in mutuality and civility. On the way to a new kind of meta-economic consensus. One small farm at a time. One local food system at a time. One act of “leaving in, instead of taking out” at a time. One 0% loan at a time. One small contribution at a time. And, if we are sufficiently conscientious and supremely fortunate, one step at a time down the path to the truly transformational change that lies beyond.

A *Call to Farms* is brought to you by
your friends at beetcoin.org
and the Slow Money Institute.



Testimonials for *A Call To Farms*

“The social and environmental crises of our times call for radically new economic vision. Who knew that poetry could seed it? Now we know.”

—Leslie Christian, NorthStar Asset Management

“This beautiful, small volume is a treasure of insight and inspiration, providing us with the vision we all desperately need to go forward!”

—Frederick Kirschenmann, Stone Barns Center
for Food and Agriculture

“Audre Lorde, the brilliant poet, scholar, educator, activist and lifesaving leader for generations of people targeted for destruction by homophobia, sexism, racism, is quoted as saying, ‘I’m doing my work, are you doing yours?’ Woody Tasch is doing his work. I am profoundly grateful for his thought leadership, for his service, and for this groundbreaking, visionary book.”

—Peggy Gould, Sarah Lawrence College

“This is the path to an alternative future.”

—Zoe Bradbury, Valley Flora Farm

“Woody Tasch brings poetry and vital humanism to the most arid and disembodied of human endeavors, finance and investing. *A Call To Farms* is a moral compass for our complex, highly-polarized and violent times—helping us chart a course away from ideology and towards healthy communities, healthy soil and an economy that does less harm.”

—Marco Vangelisti, Fulbright Scholar in Economics

“When they write the history of food, agriculture and economic thought in the early 21st century, I know that the Slow Money movement and Woody Tasch will appear in the record. Not only because truth has been spoken to financial power, but because the framing of our great capital problem has been so skillfully articulated. And because community members have been inspired to embrace a new paradigm, seeding their local economies with regenerative values and full hearts.”

—Michael Dimock, Roots of Change

“The future will be made by the hands of farmers, visionaries and those who put their prayers in Mother Earth. That’s the story we are unfolding. “

—Winona LaDuke, Honor the Earth

About the Author

Woody Tasch is founder and chairman of the Slow Money Institute. His first book, *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered* (Chelsea Green, 2008), sparked a movement, inspiring tens of thousands of individuals to invest in local, organic farms and food enterprises. He is also author of *SOIL: Notes Toward the Theory and Practice of Nurture Capital* (Slow Money Institute, 2017) and *AHA!: Fake Trillions, Real Billions, Bitcoin and the Great American Do-Over* (Slow Money Institute, 2021).

For decades, Woody has been innovating at the nexus of venture capital, social investing and philanthropy. He was chairman and CEO of Investors' Circle, one of the oldest angel networks in the U.S., facilitating the flow of more than \$275 million to hundreds of sustainability-minded early-stage companies. In the 1990s, he was treasurer of the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, where he pioneered mission-related investing, and founding chairman of the Community Development Venture Capital Alliance. In the 1980s, he was a principal at Prince Ventures, a healthcare venture capital fund. *Utne Reader* named him one of "25 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World."

“This war reminds us that the soil of our humanity needs to be regenerated. Non-industrial-scale farms and local food are a way for us to see each other as humans again. Thanks and more thanks for this profoundly illuminating guide to new ways of seeing the economy, the world and our places in them.”

—SHERYL O’LOUGHLIN, FORMER CEO, CLIF BAR

“Moving reflections for this complex age.”

—CARLO PETRINI, FOUNDER, SLOW FOOD

“A recipe for cultural healing.”

—NARENDRA VARMA, OUR TABLE COOPERATIVE

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