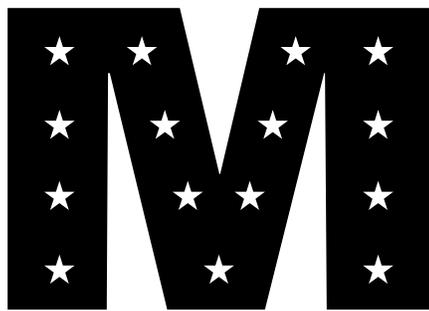


# The Land Report

A publication of The Land Institute / Number 92 / Fall 2008



y country, my America,

defined patriotism as a

willingness to sacrifice.

If we could do that once,

we could do that again. We could take the

American flag down from the outlet mall and

plant it at the victory garden. –Barbara Kingsolver

Will the Real Conservatives Please Stand Up?

*plus* Changing Heroes

## Breeding Perennial Rice in China

In September, Land Institute plant breeders Stan Cox and David Van Tassel visited breeders in China who are developing perennial varieties of rice, arguably the world's most important food crop, on which some 3 billion people depend. Cox went on to see Australians working toward perennial wheat. The Land Institute supports both efforts, to spread development of perennial grains beyond its own climate and geography.

Cox and Van Tassel drove through the countryside of Yunnan Province in south China and saw cropping on frighteningly steep slopes with no terraces to curb erosion. Most of the crops were corn, with some sunflower. But much of the rice in south Yunnan, northern Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Thailand is grown on hillsides, not in flat, lowland paddies. This upland rice is what the Chinese are breeding to be a perennial crop, though paddy hybrids might follow.

At Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Sciences' experiment station on Hainan Island, off the south coast of mainland China, Cox and Van Tassel were impressed by rice nurseries of descendants from a single hybrid plant that Yunnan's Tao Dayun made 10 years ago in a difficult cross between cultivated rice, *Oryza sativa*, and a wild African species, *Oryza longistaminata*. The wild plant has rhizomes, the underground stems seen in many perennials.

One plot featured plants grown from cuttings from the original hybrid. Since The Land Institute began funding Yunnan in 2007, the academy has rapidly expanded this breeding program.

Academy leader Hu Fengyi showed a nursery of more than 1,800 rhizomatous hybrids from an original nursery of 6,000 plants produced through self-pollination by clones from the cuttings. These plants with rhizomes were in their third season of regrowth—in the tropics they may achieve 2.5 generations in a year. The great majority were highly sterile, which is common in early hybrids. But at least 25 percent of flowers set seed in a small percentage of the plants. Two strongly rhizomatous plants each had more than 100 seeds. With these stars, breeding continues.

Another nursery featured 3,000 plants produced by crossing the original hybrid with commercial rice. Hu said about 20 made rhizomes after harvest. A few of those plants had good fertility and grew short like commercial varieties.

With these small early successes in both populations,



Hu Fengyi with the perennial rice he's breeding at Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Sciences. David Van Tassel photo.



Agricultural Sciences. The rice is irrigated to assure success in breeding, but is intended for dryland farming on erosion-prone slopes.

researchers were confident of breaking the relationship between rhizomes and sterility.

But their work shows plant breeding's demanding game of numbers. The second-generation hybrids that made both rhizomes and seeds were so rare that had Hu grown only 3,000 instead of 6,000 originally, he might have found none with those traits combined, and concluded that it was impossible. So Hu will continue to grow big populations to select from.

The work with such large numbers of plants, including harvesting, digging, washing, separating and weighing rhizomes, is made possible with Hainan's plentiful labor. Production of commercial rice hybrids is confined to China, where all seed is produced by hand-pollination, a highly laborious process. The Land Institute does this for some of its hybrids, but not on a commercial scale.

The Chinese and the Americans discussed establishing a world perennial grain breeding network, beginning with scientists in the United States, China, Australia and Canada. The Chinese government supports such efforts, and funded The Land Institute plant breeders' trip. The Americans arranged to send seed of intermediate wheatgrass, a perennial that they are domesticating, and perennial wheat, sunflower and sorghum to the Yunnan academy. Hu is eager to establish perennial breeding in those crops as well as rice.

In Australia, Cox presented The Land Institute's work to the Australian Society of Agronomy, which sponsored his trip. He gave two radio interviews, including to the national network's agriculture program, and visited early plantings by a state and federal government effort to breed perennial wheat. Researchers led by Philip Larkin and Len Wade are using seed from The Land Institute and Washington State University. A tough quarantine system slows the seed transfer, which was agreed to some three years ago. Australia wants perennial grain cropping to cut pollution of rivers in the rainier east, and in the west to replace annual crops whose shallow, seasonal roots don't prevent salty groundwater from rising and damaging the soil.

### Presentations Made

The "Short Course," which introduces The Land Institute's work to undergraduates and others, was held this year to segue into the weekend Prairie Festival. Three dozen people took the course. A group of six University of Kansas graduate students, only one of them a biologist, sent cheering praise of our scientists' engaging explanation of their work in understandable language. We share this not to toot our horn, but to encourage readers who might have felt intimidated about attending the Short Course—and to encourage arranged tours of The Land Institute any time of year.

Land Institute President Wes Jackson spoke at the North American Prairie Conference, Winona, Minnesota; "What's for Dinner: Food and Politics in the 21st Century," Chautauqua, New York; "Slow Food Nation: Come to the

Table," San Francisco; the Muddy Boot Organic Festival, Portland, Oregon; University of Alberta, in Edmonton; and the Sustainable Agriculture Conference, Anderson, South Carolina.

Soil scientist Jerry Glover spoke at Michigan State University's Kellogg Biological Station, Hickory Corners, Michigan.

### Presentations Scheduled

November 13, Potsdam, New York.

November 20, Wichita, Kansas.

February 27, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

March 4, Sherman, Texas.

March 16, Reno-Tahoe, Nevada.

April 21, Grinnell, Iowa.

For more, call or see Calendar at [landinstitute.org](http://landinstitute.org).



**M**aximilian sunflower usually grows lots of branches and seed heads. David Van Tassel, who has grown several thousand genetically unique individuals in domesticating the wild perennial, found one that focused its energy on a single head. Although its seed yield didn't match that of other plants, its seeds were the biggest yet seen. After cycles of selection, single-headed types might outyield multiheaded plants and be much easier to harvest. Scott Bontz photo.

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Want to share a story from *The Land Report*? Unless the writer objects, you may photocopy from the magazine or get the piece by e-mail. Write to Scott at [bontz@landinstitute.org](mailto:bontz@landinstitute.org) or our street address in the column at right, or call him at 785-823-5376.

## The Land Institute Mission Statement

When people, land and community are as one, all three members prosper; when they relate not as members but as competing interests, all three are exploited. By consulting nature as the source and measure of that membership, The Land Institute seeks to develop an agriculture that will save soil from being lost or poisoned, while promoting a community life at once prosperous and enduring.

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# Will the Real Conservatives Please Stand Up?

Scott Bontz

Quoting Winston Churchill, ecologist Curt Meine told the record 900 or so visitors at The Land Institute's Prairie Festival: "We have entered an age of consequences." That we faced such an age has been my sense from the annual festivals since my first in 1999. But the festival this year, September 26-28, came with dust thick from Wall Street's toppling pillars, and, as was noted by one speaker, if you average the estimates of when oil production is to peak before its irreversible fall, you get 2008.

Following are reports of what festival speakers said about consequences past, present and future, including Donald Worster on Theodore Roosevelt's confused legacy of conservation and exploitation, Barbara Kingsolver calling Americans to rediscover and cherish the wealth of their land, and Wes Jackson on drafting a farm bill not aimed to

push production for five years, but to achieve sustainability over 50. If you'd like to hear the complete talks, see the order form for compact discs on page 17.

## The Roots of a Pound of Flesh

Facing a fresh, morning audience in the barn, Jerry Glover reached behind and pretended to painfully extract a chunk of what he's made of. It was a raw beef cut. But all flesh is grass, and The Land Institute's soil scientist and agroecologist wanted to impress upon his listeners that the body depends on nutrients made of elements in soil. For flourish of this universal truth, he reached under his shirt, wrenched out a rib cut and said, "That's the female side of me coming out."



Summer, 3:30 to 4:15 p.m. August 9, 1978, Fent's Prairie, Salina, Kansas. Terry Evans photo.

Then he played it straight with a one-sentence description of The Land Institute's work: To find ways that 6 billion to 9 billion people can get those necessary elements out of the land and into their bodies as food without destroying the earth.

Glover said agriculture, the biggest ecosystem on the planet, is also the biggest threat, even more so than urbanization. This is largely because agriculture's prime source of calories to feed us has been annuals, which require tillage and leave soil bare to erosion for much of the year. Or they take herbicides, which pollute soil and water.

The Land Institute works to convert agricultural grain cropping from annuals to perennials, following the vegetation pattern in most of nature. Glover said perennials manage better the water, nitrogen and other elements in the soil, with roots that remain alive year-round instead of

dying off each fall. And they can exceed the mass of annual crop roots by a factor of seven.

To show this, Glover's helper, John Mai, worked pulleys of fishing line to raise several preserved plants, which until then had nested in pots behind the lectern, only their stems and leaves visible. Now they rose to the barn rafters and let down their subterranean tresses. The tail of an annual wheat plant hung about four feet below its crown, only a gauzy veil against the brown barn wall behind. The roots of suspended perennials reached up to 10 feet. Those of big bluestem had grown as thick as the beard on Father Time. Festival-goers caressed these roots, photographed one another standing by them, and pointed their cameras up for the perspective of prairie grass as towering redwood—a plant with roots only about half as deep as the bluestem's.





Catherine Badgley and the roots of a prairie perennial, big bluestem, at the Prairie Festival.  
Scott Bontz photo.

Lee DeHaan, one of The Land Institute's plant breeders, said experts argue there's too much to overcome in making wild perennial plants into vigorous domesticates with lots of big seeds, like annual grain crops. But annual grains began as plants selected from the wild, and without 21st-century scientific knowledge and technique.

DeHaan directed a thought experiment: Imagine there are five traits to select for, such as larger seed and short stalks, so the plant doesn't waste energy on competition with neighbors in the field. Even plants within a species can be diverse, so though the large majority might have smaller seeds, one in a thousand might have larger ones. "The variability is out there, we just need to find it," DeHaan said. Now, to find by chance all five traits in one plant is not a 1-in-5,000 shot. It's one in a quadrillion. So that there are naysayers of The Land Institute's work isn't a surprise. But success isn't that hard, DeHaan said. If we find one desirable trait in one plant and one in another, we can mate them to see both traits in offspring within a few years. Even though our need to accumulate dozens of particular genes complicates the matter, through selecting and recombining with sexual reproduction, we can develop a crop plant fairly fast. DeHaan estimates that every two to three years he will be able to increase the seed yield of the perennial intermediate wheatgrass by 100 pounds per acre. "We're starting to see some amazingly big seeds" on hearty plants, he said. The Land Institute hopes to have a system of perennial grain cropping ready for farmers in 25 to 50 years.

Plant breeder David Van Tassel offered an example of how advances come not just deliberately but fortuitously. A wild perennial called Maximilian sunflower makes many branches and heads on each stalk—both undesirable for harvest ease. Van Tassel didn't think this splayed growth could be avoided quickly by breeding, so he initially focused on selection for seed size and number. But among 2,000 plants he found one that had a single, relatively large seed head. He showed the audience one of this plant's offspring, with two heads, still far less than Maximilian's typical dozens. He hadn't expected to see the single head. But American Indians might have made a similar discovery among annual sunflower and found that one head makes more big seeds, a big step toward the current crop plant.

Another example of the unexpected: The single-headed Maximilian plant had much bigger leaves. "I don't even know what that means," Van Tassel said, "but something is happening."

For the surprise that festival-goers got in the spirit of fun, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and see Van Tassel, DeHaan, field technician Marty Christians and Development Director John Schmidt harmonize about The Land Institute's work. Search for "Land Institute: The Perennials."

## Science and Politics, Margins and Levers

One hundred years ago President Theodore Roosevelt brought governors and other leaders together for the first national conference on restoration and conservation. Prairie Festival speakers this year played on that history.

Land Institute President Wes Jackson noted that 1908 also brought the birth of *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson. Despite Carson's warning in 1962 about dangers of overusing synthetic pesticides, chemicals unknown during evolution, their use has multiplied. "It appears as though our side is losing," Jackson said. Before opening the talks about conservation by guest speakers, he made this pitch: That the engine for change is from the margins, but the levers are in government.

Mark Parkinson argued differently. Kansas' lieutenant governor got the biggest applause at last year's festival, for a short speech about fighting coal-fired power plants in Kansas. Shortly later, the state's secretary of health and environment denied permits for the plants. Legislators failed to overturn that decision, but are expected to try again in the coming session. At this year's festival, Parkinson suggested that solution of the energy crisis will not be political, but scientific.

First he gave his appraisal of the problem. He said we are at, near or past critical points that will change the world's climate, and greenhouse emissions must not just be made stable, but reduced. He figures the chance that we won't solve the problem before we pass the tipping points—with a rising middle class around the world and a population heading from 6.3 billion now to 9 billion—is 95 percent. It certainly won't happen with current technology, he said.

He called political effort until now a failure: Targets have been agreed upon and congratulations exchanged, but emissions keep rising. The problem lies not just with the United States, which snubbed the Kyoto accord to reduce emissions, but with the whole world. Parkinson said legislatures won't vote to increase the cost of energy with cap-and-trade schemes that aren't full of holes. Of political solution, he said, "Why would we think, if it hasn't worked in the past, it will work in the future?"

But he said, "Science can solve this problem. I really believe that." He pointed to how compact fluorescent bulbs are replacing incandescent bulbs not because they were required, but because technological advances have made them more economical.

Here Parkinson saw a role for government. The technology to solve the crisis will take investment that the market might not want to make immediately. He said Congress should dramatically raise funding for research and development of alternative energy from the current \$2.5 billion—in a nation whose consumers spend \$5 billion on candy, costumes and decorations for Halloween.

Parkinson told the audience not to abandon lobbying for direct political solution. Common ground may be found. But he encouraged funding for these energy alternatives:

- Lithium batteries to make electric cars more practical.
- Solar energy—which he said was close to practical, but for which there still isn't enough private capital.
- Storage of electricity from wind.

He urged that the technology be shared with the world.

Parkinson also noted that electricity made from wind turbines in the Midwest this year would triple.

He offered a favorite quote from Jack Kerouac in *On the Road*: “The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn, like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue center-light pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’”

Curt Meine gave advice similar to Parkinson's. “Don't look up for leadership. Don't confuse authority with leadership. Don't wait for it,” he said. “If you're looking for leadership, look to the person sitting next to you.”

But Meine, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin, wrote conservationist Aldo Leopold's biography, and works for the Leopold Foundation and the Center for Humans and Nature, also said, “It's time for another governor's conference.”

He offered this excerpt from Charles Richard Van Hise's *The Conservation of Natural Resources in the United States*, published just eight years after the meeting that Meine said put the word conservation into public consciousness a century ago:

“As we have already seen, the land of this country was originally an area unsurpassed in fertility anywhere in the world. Although it has been only about 300 years since settlement first began, and less than 50 years since more than half the farms were virgin fields, already there has been great deterioration of the soil in many localities.”

(Here the book goes on for paragraphs describing the losses of each region.)

“What is to be our measure of time with reference to the future? Are we to think of these lands as being available to man only 50 years, or 100 years? or should we consider 1,000 years, or 10,000 years, or 100,000 years, or 1,000,000 years, or 10,000,000 years? From a geological point of view there is no reason whatever why people may not live in this country and occupy this land for the longer of these periods. Their mention makes you smile; 10,000 or 10,000,000 years are practically synonymous with us. Either is farther ahead than we can look. Whether we think of the future of man as 10,000 or 10,000,000

years, it is clear that our duty to posterity demands that the process of depletion of the land be no longer continued: that from now on the lands be not permitted to become less fertile; not only so, but that those lands which have become depleted, if possible be restored in some measure, if not completely, to their original fertility. This problem is the most fundamental, far-reaching, most important of the problems of conservation which confront this nation.”

But we're still losing tons of soil and substituting mined fertilizer for natural fertility.

Meine also noted that 1908 was the year that Ford began producing the Model T, the first mass-produced and generally affordable car.

## Roosevelt's Paradox

Freedom, victory, Mother Earth: Donald Worster said that sacred words repeated grow trite. But he offered a word that retains its power: growth. “For some people, it's more sacred than God or country,” said Worster, an environmental history professor at the University of Kansas, a Land Institute board member and author of the new book *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*. Growth has built America's empire and institutions, and made it a consumer's paradise.

Americans want more than growth. They want to conserve great land. But growth has an environmental cost. We want it both ways, and so do others around the world, Worster said.

And so did Theodore Roosevelt, a man who Worster described as always suspicious of Wall Street and the first president to face the idea of economic limits. Since Roosevelt left office in 1909, politicians have tried to claim his legacy as conservationist. But that legacy was confused. Worster said we still await a candidate who can clean it up.

When Roosevelt took office in 1901, the United States had made itself wealthy by exploitation. Worster said Roosevelt, completely self-assured, pounding fist to palm, snapping his teeth, now sought to move conservation from the fringe to the center. When he was born, the word conservation was not in the American household. But his wealthy family instilled in him that with riches came responsibility, and as a hunter he founded the Boone and Crockett Club, men who loved to take big game animals but recognized the need to conserve them. The club fought poachers of Yellowstone bison and was crucial to saving animals from extinction.

Roosevelt was determined to create a legacy of public lands unlike any in the world. He set aside 150 million acres, to the bitter resentment of those who would exploit that land, Worster said. He arranged a system of wildlife

refuges and sanctuaries, saw creation of five new national parks and won authority to set aside national monuments including the Grand Canyon. Worster said no president did more to “nationalize, socialize, democratize” American lands.

But his conservation was confusing, ambiguous. He exploited resources in conservation’s name, to serve business and the economic strength of the nation. This program would go on to include repeatedly damming every major river in the West. The endeavor was beyond private capital. Roosevelt led state-assisted capitalism for rationalized, long-term exploitation. “He was turning the idea of conservation into another kind of conquest,” Worster said. And he never addressed the paradox.

His restoration and conservation conference brought together not just governors, but industrialists, editors, labor leaders and one woman, the leader of a women’s organization. It did not include the leading conservationist of the day, John Muir, who disagreed with what the president was making of conservation.

Gifford Pinchot, main architect of the conference, was the first leader of the Forest Service. He both coined the phrase “conservation ethic” as applied to natural resources, and, Worster said, called the forest a “manufacturing plant for the production of wood.”

And this management philosophy has worked. But the land is being pushed harder than ever, Worster said: We are mining and pounding our soils, and private lands can’t meet demand, so public lands are exploited by the industrial state.

Worster said government is the best conservator, but, citing the example of subsidies for ethanol, it is not a good developer. Giving government that power to effect growth can be as bad as or worse than giving it to corporations, he said. There are no checks and balances. Worster said the definition of conservation should be the first part of the one Roosevelt held. “Conservation must mean protection,” he said, the countervailing force against the market. Government should serve as a check, not a partner.

Joyce and Nick Fent’s property was a laboratory for Land Institute plant studies in the late 1970s, and where photographer Terry Evans learned about prairie. “It’s not a screamingly loud ecosystem,” she told the Prairie Festival audience, but the place’s subtle intricacy of the grasses and forbs grew to obsess her. She walked it daily to amass more than 4,000 pictures. Evans quoted Navajo teacher Barney Mitchell: “The greatest sacred thing is knowing the order and the structure of things.” Recently she dug out the pictures, and arranged the square originals linked in groups of two, three and four. She said the long images seemed more like a visit to the prairie. They hung on the walls of the barn where festival-goers hear speakers. Also on the wall was a painted representation of how The Land Institute hopes to

see annual cropping replaced by perennials over the next half-century. And in front of the wall, suspended for comparison, were the roots of perennials and an annual. Evans, who is also a Land Institute board member, said, “Which is the art and which is the science? They all work together, it seems to me.”

## Wrestling with a Rocket

“We in the low country are particularly concerned about climate change,” said Dana Beach, founder and director of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League—and someone enamored with prairie on his first visit. Unlike in the Midwest, he said, climate change’s effects in South Carolina will be unambiguously negative, with the prospect of abandoned coastal cities.

The place is mired in the same maddening incrementalism and emotional debates as are states with less to lose, he said. South Carolinians, who use more electricity per capita than all but three other states, failed to accept the sensibility of arguments to not secede and go to war with the Union. But Beach still hoped they could do better with fighting climate change.

For encouragement he cited the case of Juneau, Alaska, where an avalanche this year cut hydroelectric lines and residents faced a fivefold rate increase for backup diesel power. In a week, use dropped 30 percent, Beach said, and even after hydroelectric service was restored, use remained 18 percent lower.

But South Carolina utility executives are seeing through efficiency gains of just 0.01 percent per year, Beach said. He believes conservation and efficiency require the opposite of a centralized, technological triumph like the moon landing. They will occur locally, with the advantage of an end-run around obstructionists, a breakaway from centralized power, a restoration of control. When Kansas rejected permits for coal-fired power plants this year it galvanized other people in the country, Beach said. He thought that changes taking place now might jog Americans past mere consumerism and avoid letting efficiency gains only beget more consumption. Clicking off the TV, using clotheslines: “The utility executives could be right. This could be a disruption of our way of life.”

We face trying to change the trajectory of a nation and an economy in one decade, Beach said: “This is not work for small and timid minds.” Altogether, Beach told the audience, you constitute an army that must, and will, change the world.

For more, see Beach’s essay in the summer *Land Report*.

“Who we need to be talking to are all the people sitting on the fence,” said Nancy Jackson, director of the Climate & Energy Project. This is The Land Institute’s effort to

connect energy use and climate change in public consciousness. Jackson described the new program at last year's festival. She's learned that the camps on each side won't budge, and only in the middle ground is there purchase. She said the project also has found that direct advocacy is counterproductive. Instead, she said, "Put a lot of data in front of folks and let them contend with it."

## Homecoming Day

Barbara Kingsolver, known mostly as author of best-selling novels such as *Prodigal Summer*, last year published *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, about how her family worked at getting most of their food from or from near their farm in western Virginia. Coming from difficult folded country to Kansas prairie lands, she teased the crowd: "I have humus envy." A mounted display of rich black soil had stood by the lectern. She said, "How do you expect a girl to concentrate?"

With laughter from the audience confirming that the speaker had established a symbiotic relationship, Kingsolver fixed her message: "New winds are blowing on this

continent." To hurricanes Katrina and Ike she added collapses like Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers. Our mothers warned us, she said: "You can't live beyond your means. Eventually the bills come due." And global warming has gone from the fringe to the front page, she said. "We have officially entered the long emergency."

She added, "Get ready for the snake oil salesmen." We look for easy outs, she said, and will be told that we must plunder what's left of resources: "Break open the bank, honey, we need those 15 cents to get through our retirement."

She said our job is to keep our hair on and to keep our heads. The hardest task will be holding faith in the land. We became rich in financial securities, but, "The wealth of our nation really is about to become our land."

Kingsolver wanted to seize the moment after the attacks of September 11, 2001, stunned the nation. She saw it as a time for Americans to come to the table and talk with the rest of the world, to engender good will by using less of that world. "And boy was I wrong," she said. Her writing on this, including in a book called *Small Wonder*, got her run up the pole of anti-patriotism, and brought loads of hate mail.



Nick and Joyce's dog, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. December 22, 1978, Fent's Prairie, Salina, Kansas. Terry Evans photo.

But with *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, to which husband Steven L. Hopp and daughter Camille Kingsolver contribute sidebars, the reception was entirely different. She said she knows the country is ready to open its heart to a reconstructive economy. “Green is really the new red, white and blue,” she said. And, “The way to a man’s politics is really through his stomach.”

People across the continent are interested in building a resilient, sustainable economy of food, Kingsolver said. She offered as an example the continuing rise of farm markets. This is not just in California and the sunny South. Before reading one of his sidebars from the book, Hopp told festival-goers that the best proportion of local produce sold in big North American cities was in Toronto.

In the two weeks before the Prairie Festival, with the stock market tumbling, Kingsolver said she listened and realized that people were talking about the wrong things. “I’m really tired of hearing people say there’s no wealth left,” she said. “Can you eat gold? Our wealth is our land.” She said we must learn to renew our love and respect for that land, though “It may take more than one of those marriage-encounter weekends to get us talking to it again.”

The task now is to be frugal, resourceful and far-sighted, she said, and get the same from our government. “We’ve been through hard times before,” she said. In 1942 Americans feared they’d lose the war, but President Franklin Roosevelt didn’t tell them to go shopping. The government, using what Kingsolver called the most effective propaganda campaign in history, got them to do with much less, so more money could go to war bonds and more material could be used to fight. A car was rationed three gallons of gasoline per week, whether the owner was rich or poor. Americans were not permitted to buy a new typewriter or wristwatch, silverware or sheets. No more than one ruffle could be sewn on a sleeve. Kingsolver didn’t claim this reduced Americans’ carbon footprint—they were building and fueling tanks and bombers. And there was profiteering. But she said most people sacrificed for a greater good, and about that they could feel heroic.

“My country, my America, defined patriotism as a willingness to sacrifice,” she said. “If we could do that once, we could do that again. We could take the American flag down from the outlet mall and plant it at the victory garden.”



Kingsolver said our enemy now might look unstoppable, but, “We just need to be afraid of the right things” and mobilize in the right ways, to redefine ourselves and our wealth, valuing not gold chains but green land.

“If we fail,” she said, “our weaknesses will run as a plague on the waters.”

## Machine, Motive and Sustainability

“Our technological criticism has been weak,” said Doug Tompkins, part of a panel discussion of conservation. Tompkins, who founded the North Face and Esprit clothing companies and has bought large tracts of Chile and Argentina for conservation, argued for rigorous questioning of technological solutions to ecological problems. Do we want big wind turbines or small turbines? What kind of society is required if we are to support nuclear power? By and large we take new technology as good, Tompkins said, but we should do more homework.

Conn Nugent, chairman of The Land Institute’s Board of

Directors, said the three things most impelling for humans are cost, comfort and convenience. And he said we tend to define happiness and domestic tranquility by purchasing power. With these driving an extractive economy, he said, the only solution is to drastically raise fossil fuel prices—so high that he would no longer be able to fly from New York to Kansas.

Angus Wright opened with this from T. S. Eliot: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

Wright, a Land Institute board member and retired professor of environmental studies at California State University in Sacramento, was among 382 researchers—few if any of them farmers, he noted later in the talk—to write an international study of how agricultural science and technology can bring sustainable development. Eventually some 800 people had a hand in preparing the report. The report was sponsored by the United Nations, the World Bank, and the Millennium Foundation.



The Big Barn isn’t big enough to hold all who come to see Prairie Festival presenters, but loudspeakers carry

the talks outside. This picture is actually dozens, made with a point-and-shoot camera on an apparatus called Gigapan

Invited nonprofits, fearing bureaucracy and the corporate interests that often dominate such undertakings, were reluctant to join. But recognizing that to forego participation guaranteed failure, they signed on. Of his own commitment, Wright said in gravelly imitation of Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*, “You try to get out and they pull you back in.”

The report is on the Web site [www.agassessment.org](http://www.agassessment.org) and is to be published next year. Wright said that sections were turgid and contradictory, reflecting those 800 pairs of hands. But the report advocates fundamental changes in agricultural research and policy. It looks beyond crop yields to consider environmental quality, farm labor, equitability, biodiversity and climate change. And it recognizes that the shift of agricultural research from public to private funding has hurt small farms and the poor, as have shifts in property rights in seeds and genetic materials that favor private corporate interests.

The report recognizes possible benefits from genetically engineered crops and does not oppose them, Wright said. But it has suffered criticism as “junk science” in the

prestigious magazine *Nature* and elsewhere, primarily at the hands of two of the report’s participants, who argue that genetic engineering is the only solution.

Wright said this, like corn and soybeans attaining a stranglehold on upper Midwest farms that once were diverse with crop rotations and animals, is an example of the winner-take-all assault of corporate agriculture. In contrast, the report, endorsed by the governments of the United Nations with the exception of the United States, Canada and Australia, argues for a diverse set of objectives, crops and research strategies to feed the world while sustaining the environment and communities. Wright emphasized that most of the conclusions of the report have long been advocated by the Land Institute.

## After a New Heaven

About a year and a half ago, Land Institute President Wes Jackson and board member Strachan Donnelley met with Bob Kerrey, who has been governor of Nebraska



and assembled with the system’s software. To see the detail captured here and in other scenes at The Land Institute, see

[www.gigapan.org](http://www.gigapan.org), and search for TLI. The Gigapan operator is Steve Renich.

and served that state in the Senate. Kerrey wanted Jackson involved in preparing the federal farm bill. Jackson said he wasn't interested, because the bill favors agribusiness and exports, at the cost of farms going bankrupt and pesticide use climbing.

The bills also cover only five years. Jackson said he suggested to Kerrey a farm bill that looks 50 years ahead, with a goal bigger and more healthful for the country than merely maximizing production during time just a bit longer than one presidential term. He suggested the United States have a malleable but strong long-term guide for making its agriculture conserving, resilient, sustainable, free of reliance on fossil fuels. Kerrey suggested using five-year plans as mileposts.

Jackson told the festival audience that now is the time to pursue this systemic effort for growing America's food and fiber sustainably, because the nation still has the slack allowed by fossil fuel: "The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be." And though there are technical alternatives for energy, "There's not technical alternatives to soil."

A Land Institute benefactor encouraged Jackson to present a 50-year plan and an argument for it to John McCain and Barack Obama. In Washington, D.C., this summer Jackson met with writer Wendell Berry, economist Herman Daly, environmental studies scholars David Orr and Angus Wright, and others. They drafted a broad outline for the 50-year plan. Then Jackson began to build a coalition with groups representing farmers, forestry, ranchers, environmentalists and other nonprofits, at regional meetings around the nation. He hopes to reach the president-elect through transition team members.

To get attention and voltage for this effort, Jackson said, will require what he called a vision of the possible. He reminded the audience that Martin Luther King didn't say, "I have a plan."

Jackson said he knew the coalition might appear to be tilting at windmills. But notions are only grandiose when they are for something necessary but impossible, or possible but not necessary. He said that what we face is both possible and necessary. "It just means you've got work to do."

Among land uses for food and fiber, Jackson said, agriculture is the most invasive, and that's why work toward a sustainable economy requires starting there, where humans began destruction of the economy of nature. Fossil fuels declining while human population and consumption continue to rise could launch social upheaval. Jackson said we might avoid this if we can still grow enough food: "If we can stay fed, we have a chance to keep our wits." Before his talk about the bill, he said of Barbara Kingsolver's call to take the flag down from the mall and plant it in victory garden:

"That symbolic statement could probably do more than anything to restructure our consciousness."

In the late 1980s, at the dedication of The Land Institute's greenhouse, Wendell Berry talked about looking to nature as the measure for what we want to do. Jackson said Berry had found this practical idea as far back as the book of Job and up to Alexander Pope in the 18th century. Then it went underground. Jackson said the romanticists saw nature more as a reservoir of symbols rather than of practical value. The idea appeared again around the beginning to the 20th century in the writings of Liberty Hyde Bailey, Albert Howard and J. Russell Smith. But Berry observed that the perspective of nature as measure came as a series, not as a succession. The succession is in the common culture, from generation to generation. Jackson said that our job is to have nature as measure become a succession in the formal culture—in science, in the arts, in the humanities.

Using nature as measure is relatively easy in forestry and ranching, Jackson said. The Land Institute applies it to the tougher job of the farm. "Think in terms of information," he said: There is cultural information, and there is biological information in the DNA of all the species in an ecosystem. With lots of the latter, you don't need so much knowhow. But with reduction by the plow, "It's very hard to stay out of trouble." You may succeed in a garden, where the scale is small, Jackson said, but not on the scale of the farm.

Jackson said humanity finally is arriving at an ecological worldview. "I think we're on the verge of getting to know the place for the first time," he said.

We couldn't have made the trip and come to our modern self-recognition without drawing from the five pools of energy-rich carbon, he said. Without soil, forests and coal, Darwin wouldn't have sailed around the world and given us the crucial insight of evolutionary biology. Without petroleum and natural gas, we wouldn't have developed, launched or peered through the Hubble telescope toward the universe's birth. "We got a new heaven," Jackson said. "We have a challenge now to have a new earth."

For this difficult job, he said, the next secretary of agriculture must work to bring more perennials to the landscape—where The Land Institute breeding perennial grain crops fits in—and enlist ecologists and evolutionary biologists. The new president must be informed about ecology and the primary productivity of plants, and honor the "efficiencies inherent in natural integrities" like that between legumes and nitrogen-fixing bacteria.

We need to use the ecosystem as the conceptual tool and bring processes of the wild to the farm, Jackson said. He thinks this is the human species' most important moment since the beginning of agriculture 10,000 years ago.

# Prairie Festival Recordings

September 26-28, 2008, The Land Institute

Quantity	Title	Speakers
_____	Report from The Land Institute	Land Institute research staff
_____	About the Festival	Mark Parkinson, Curt Meine, Wes Jackson
_____	The True Wealth of Nations: Teddy Roosevelt and the American Conservation Ethic	Donald Worster
_____	Local Heroes: Power to the People	Dana Beach
_____	Faith in the Land: Shaping a New Economy	Barbara Kingsolver, Steven L. Hopp
_____	Panel Discussion about Conservation	Curt Meine, Conn Nugent, Doug Tompkins
_____	The Future of Agriculture: Winner Takes All?	Angus Wright
_____	The Next 50 Years on the American Land: Perennializing Policy and the Landscape	Wes Jackson

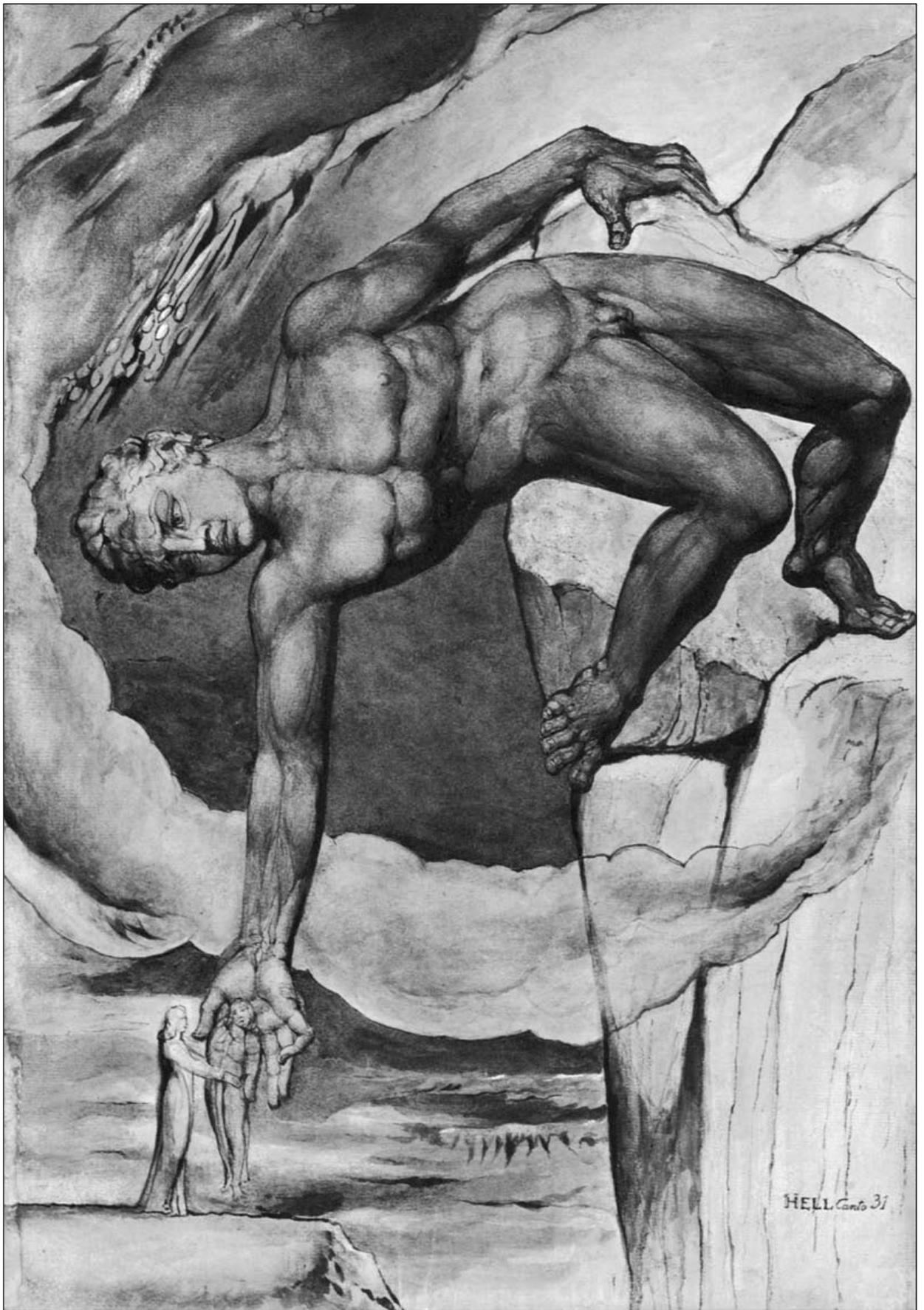
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**F**rom year to year watching  
 from his porch, my grandfather  
 saw a barn roof slowly  
 come into sight above  
 a neighboring ridge as plows  
 and rains wore down the hill.  
 —from Wendell Berry’s poem *Where*



Dante enlists the giant Antaeus to help him and his guide, Virgil, through hell in *The Divine Comedy*. William Blake, pen and watercolor, 14¾ x 20¾ inches, National Gallery of Victoria.

# Changing Heroes

Jonathan G. Andelson

**T**he widespread destruction of tallgrass prairie in North America resulted from a model of the hero and heroic action that has been part of Western thought since antiquity. It isn't our only model of heroic action, but it may be the most common. The destruction continues today: soil erosion, the loss of biodiversity and the pollution of our soils and waters by chemical-intensive agriculture. The time has come to renounce that model and cultivate a new kind of hero who can show us how to heal our relationship with the land.

In ancient Greece, the greatest hero was Herakles—to the Romans, Hercules. As a boy he learned archery from Apollo's grandson, wrestling from a son of Hermes, and arms from a son of Zeus. At manhood he embarked on a storied career of far-flung travels and remarkable exploits. He captured the Minoan bull, restored a queen held captive in Hades, slaughtered the nine-headed Hydra, fought and defeated a river god, briefly held up the sky on his powerful shoulders, and freed Prometheus from his barren cliffside. He diverted a river to flush clean the world's foulest stables. Herakles epitomizes courage, physical strength, endurance and the ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Despite his legendary deeds and unequalled prowess, the thing that strikes me most about Herakles is a deficiency: He lacked a clear and strong connection to place. He was rootless. He roamed, he conquered, he never settled down, never had a place to care for. How different in this respect he is from the ancient hero Odysseus, who traveled as widely and for as long, but always thought of home. Herakles had no home. He was disconnected. And his actions often disconnected others from their places, most vividly in his wrestling match with Antaeus, about which more in a moment. Significantly, the stories about Herakles do not present his disconnection from place as in any way problematic. Therein lies their relevance to one of our current predicaments.

Herakles' displacement can be traced to before his birth. Zeus, enamored of the wife of a Theban general, visited her in the guise of her husband, who was away at war. Their union produced a child, Herakles, half god and half human, not fully in either world. Zeus' wife, Hera, vindictively blamed the child for the affront to her honor. Perhaps Hera's anger toward Herakles—first manifested in her interference in his birth and oftentimes thereafter, as Euripides tells us—helps explain the fits of anger that occasionally possessed Herakles. As a youth, he became enraged at his music teacher over an unnamed affront and slew him with a lyre. More bizarre still was the lapse of self-awareness when he killed his own wife and children. His howling remorse was

genuine, and he was only dissuaded from taking his own life by his friend Theseus. But the episode ended any semblance of a normal life for Herakles.

Unable to find rest at Theseus' home in Athens, he traveled to Delphi and accepted the oracle's pronouncement that he should do extreme penance for his action. Then either the oracle or Apollo ordered him to serve King Eurystheus, who designed the famous Labors of Herakles as a series of apparently impossible tests. From then on, even after completing the labors—one of which was to clean the Augean stables—Herakles traveled from one adventure to another, virtually without respite, until his death, whereupon the gods granted him immortality.

Antaeus is said to have been a son or grandson of the sea god Poseidon. He lived in Libya, and according to the ancient writer Apollodorus was king. It was Antaeus' custom to challenge heroic visitors to a wrestling match, which he invariably won. The earliest accounts of Antaeus say little about how he was able to win these bouts, though the Archaic period poet Pindar tells us that Antaeus used the skulls of his defeated opponents to roof the temple of Poseidon, and that it was to put a stop to this that Herakles sought him out. The first source to explain Antaeus' success is Ovid, who tells us that his secret, paradoxically, lay in his opponent throwing him to the ground. For there Antaeus drew strength from the earth, who was his mother, Gaia, and rose up more powerful than before. Herakles arrived in Libya, discovered Antaeus' secret, and during their match lifted him off the ground, defeating him by breaking his connection with Mother Earth.

Readers are far more likely to know Herakles' exploits than the crime for which they were penance, and the Western world has long admired the Herakles type. To embark on projects in foreign lands, to face seemingly impossible odds, to persevere in the task, ultimately to achieve the goal, win the race, clean up the mess, vanquish the opposition—this is the stuff of Alexander the Great, the Roman conquests, the Crusades, Cortez's overthrow of the Aztecs, Andrew Jackson's subjugation of the Cherokees, the British defeat of the Zulus and George Bush's Iraq War. It is also the stuff of Columbus' voyages, the Lewis and Clark expedition, Henry M. Stanley's African projects and Edmund Hillary's "conquest" of Mount Everest. Even those exploits that have neither individual instigator nor adversary, such as the various enterprises of the Hudson's Bay Co., are seen as heroic if they involve travel to a far land, long odds, a struggle and achievement.

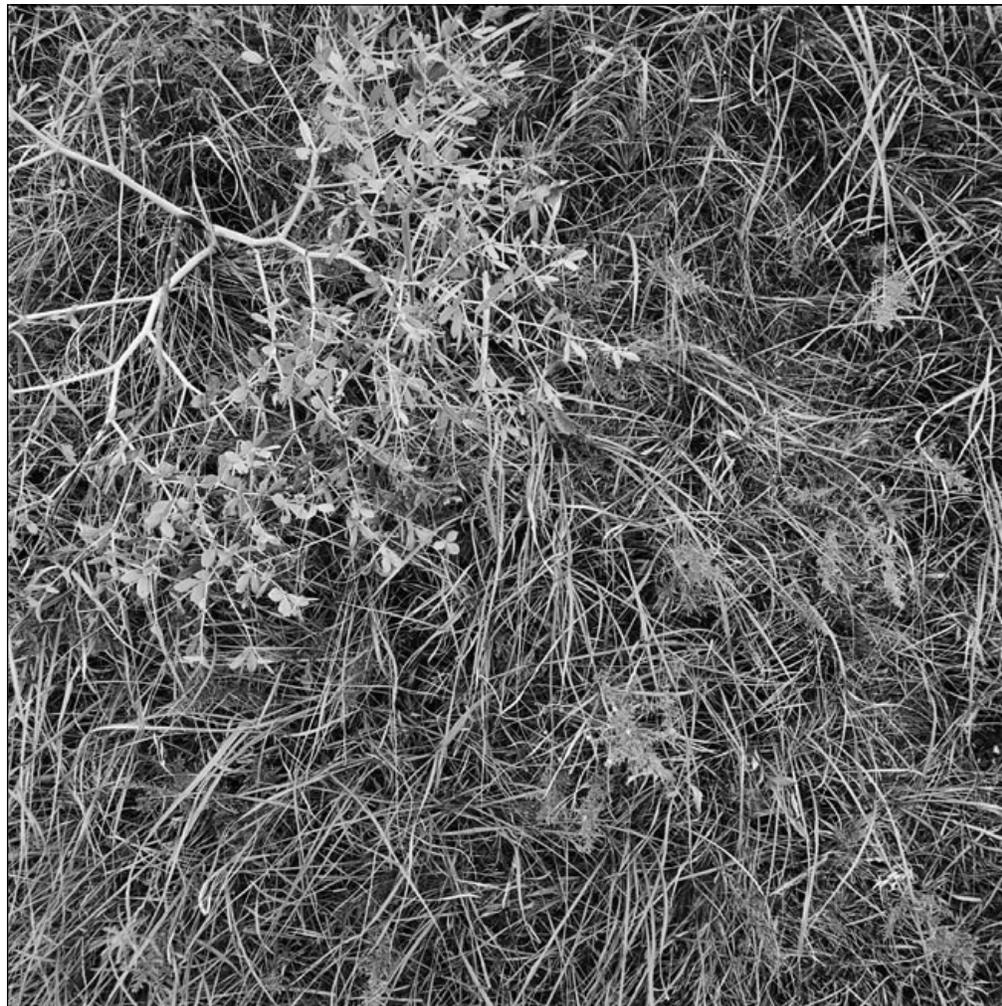
Another example of this last kind of endeavor was breaking the prairie in the middle of the 19th century.

Though lacking a hero—John Deere, the Illinois blacksmith who perfected the plow that did the job, falls short—the episode matches one of Herakles’ labors. Vaster than the Augean stables, the prairie represented a grand, impressive, daunting challenge west of the woodlands where the horizon began. An army of surveyors, sodbusters, pioneers, homesteaders and speculators, each carrying a fragment of Heraklean might and resolve, was loosed upon the undertaking and through sweat and toil collectively tamed the land. Their stories have been told and retold, their memory enshrined, their actions commemorated in music, art and literature. They embody Heraklean heroism on a human scale.

Unfortunately, the episode had other, less heroic features. In the first place, the people who were already living in the prairie—the Ioway, Oto, Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux, Missouri, Kansa, Pawnee—had to be killed, or at least dispossessed. In mythology, monsters such as the Hydra killed by Herakles or the sphinx killed by Oedipus often symbolize autochthony, the condition of being native to a place. Conversely, native peoples have often been viewed by conquerors as monstrous or subhuman to justify

their conquest. Antaeus the skull collector is so depicted in the Herakles story, and the Indians of the prairie and Plains were similarly viewed as inferior, even wicked. Their dispossession was accomplished by an army, which pried them from the land as surely as Herakles lifted Antaeus. In keeping with their actions, the intruders largely rejected learning from Indians anything useful about the place.

This helps to explain a second lamentable aspect of taming the prairie: the intruders’ tendency to view the land as Other—a malleable object of basically instrumental value, or, as Aldo Leopold might have put it, something outside their own moral community. That the intruders came from elsewhere might explain this inclination but for the fact that they had treated elsewhere in much the same way—which is why some of them came west to the prairie. In any case, they misunderstood the land. They little comprehended the source of the soil’s fertility, the value of the prairie’s diversity or the inevitability that plowed ground erodes in heavy spring rains. They mistook the vastness of the prairie for infinity and the deep richness of its soil for immortality. They thought the bounty would last forever.



Holding wild indigo, 1 to 2 p.m. September 12, 1978, Fent’s Prairie, Salina, Kansas. Terry Evans photo.

And for that bounty, they immediately set about making changes. After breaking the prairie—an idea foreign to the Indians—they suppressed all fire, built railroads and towns, straightened rivers and laid down a grid of roads. They pulled out native bluestem and Indiangrass, and planted wheat and corn. They introduced their roses, irises, peonies, begonias, hostas, willows and pines as if the native plants were unlovely or had nothing to tell them. Even now, few people use native prairie plants to landscape their yards or decorate their homes. The newcomers did not make themselves part of the place they came to, but remade the place into an image of themselves. They transformed Other into Self.

But isn't this the hero's way? Is it really a cause for concern? The answer to the second question depends entirely on whom one asks. The Indians, surviving today as best they can, have been concerned for more than 150 years. If ecosystems have minds—and the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, in a provocative book called *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, argued 30 years ago that they do—then the prairie, 99.9 percent of which in Iowa has been destroyed, is concerned. Some individuals are

concerned about specific plants and animals that have been extirpated, endangered or exterminated and support efforts to protect those that still can be saved. But most people are not concerned, at least not to the point of action. They say either, "Though regrettable, it happened, and we have to move forward," or, more ambiguously, "It was inevitable," or, less generously, "It is the price of progress."

The last two viewpoints silently invoke the heroic narrative, asking rhetorically, "Isn't it the hero's way?" Yes, if the heroic model is Herakles. Breaking the prairie is just the sort of thing Herakles would do: Journey, struggle, conquer, impose. But this course severs connections to place, for both dispossessed and possessors, who control the land but lack roots. It empowers, but it is morally questionable and ecologically unsound. It may also be the beginning of a pervasive disconnection of Americans from nature that psychologists and other scholars have recently been documenting, summarized in journalist Richard Louv's disturbing book, *Last Child in the Woods*.

But is Herakles' way the only way? What if we were to claim another hero, a different kind of hero? What if we were to claim Antaeus? His heroic credentials are good: the son or grandson of gods—whereas only one of Herakles' parents was a deity, who used deception to commit adultery—as well as a dweller in a fertile land and by some accounts its king—more than can be said for Herakles. Antaeus not only dwells in a place but draws from it tremendous strength.

So far, so good, but what of Antaeus' skull collection and his apparent hostility to outsiders? The former, in my view, looks like an invention of Herakles' admirers to justify his killing of Antaeus. While this is a self-serving interpretation, it fits the pattern of the cant of conquest too well to be dismissed out of hand. Antaeus' hostility to outsiders is troubling. Even if it is directed only toward heroic visitors, ones who arrive full of braggadocio, it is unattractive, only in part because of the deception involved in his wrestling strategy. Alas, Antaeus is not a perfect hero. But he is a big improvement on Herakles.

What would things look like on the prairie if the Antaeus-type was our prototypical hero? We would at least know that our strength came from the land, and we would want to stay connected to it. We would plant crops, but we would do so in a way that did not hurt the earth. Beyond that, I like to think that we would view the land's value in more than instrumental terms, that our connection to it would be mediated by filial devotion. The legend does not speak of the earth being diminished by Herakles' victory over Antaeus, but what mother does not grieve over her slain son? If Antaeus had won the match, the earth would not have come to grief. Perhaps it is not too late. If the Antaeus-type, or someone even better, becomes our hero, we will take important steps toward what Wes Jackson calls "becoming native to this place."





An old fruit crate label, with which growers once sought to set their farm products geographically and flavorfully apart from others. Do



# Putting the Face of Place on Food

Douglas Towne

The nation's farms not only feed us and delight our taste buds, they have left a colorful legacy of sometimes homespun and agrarian commercial art that could see revival. Most famous in the past were imaginative fruit crate labels. The labels, glued onto the ends of wooden produce boxes, first appeared in the 1870s when an expanded railroad network allowed fresh produce to be shipped nationwide. Growers used distinctive, easily recognized signs to identify their produce in the marketplace and convince consumers that their brand was superior. Labels advertised almost 50 different crops grown in nearly half the states, mainly in the West and South, with most originating from California.

The labels were designed by unknown artists, much like signs for roadside produce stands, and made from hand-etched Bavarian limestone. The printing was on high quality paper for durability, since the crates served as both transportation containers and bins from which consumers selected their produce. Crates were used until the 1950s, when the advent of supermarket chains reduced the marketing role of independent growers' brand names and brought on cardboard boxes.

Labels used names and images aimed to instill positive connotations with consumers: the farm or region where the crop was raised, Native Americans, cowboys, wildlife, a theme or lifestyle of the era, athletic pursuits or a humorous play on words. There also were more personalized images, of the grower's pet, sweetheart or child. Some labels, such as "4U Sebastopol Quality Apples," were precursors to our age of text messaging. Washington's Blue Mountain apples, California's Bronco Buster vegetables—each brand presented itself as distinctive.

Crate labels survived the years, having people interested in their clever art and history. The earliest collectors were typically those connected to the produce industry, such as growers and their employees. Traveling pickers and packers known as "fruit tramps" often retained examples of labels from each of their various jobs, not unlike keeping a postcard from your travels. In the early 1970s, labels became popular with a public increasingly nostalgic for vintage commercial illustrations. Stacks of crate labels archived by printers, lithographers, growers and produce distributors were marketed to the public. These colorful advertisements not only found their way to kitchen walls, but were acquired by museums to document local agricultural history.

Douglas Towne photo.

In addition to crate labels, there were commercial signs for roadside agriculture. Despite our affection for the now largely mythic family farm, this is a little-examined topic. Perhaps this is because these advertisements now are relatively rare and often in bad condition, in contrast to fruit crate labels. The agricultural signs advertise farms themselves, plus food processors, distributors and agricultural organizations. There's the "Soil Magic" fertilizer logo, with a grinning farmer. "Farms On The Go! Rosendo Casarez—Owner" features a roadrunner for the enterprise's dynamism. In the "Spark O Life Feeds" sign a lamb and chick burst forth. Moore Farms in Dome Valley, Arizona, features a happy farmer hurriedly pushing a wheelbarrow brimming with produce. A fading sign on a feed building in Burley, Idaho, bluntly reads, "Eat More Meat, Drink More Milk."

While vintage agriculture advertisements often lacked any connection to harvest, they sent the important message that produce wasn't a fungible commodity, that not all tomatoes tasted the same. Regional images sought to show terra and climate that could enhance the crop's flavor, and idyllic farm scenes presented a harmonious link between agriculture and nature.

The produce might not have lived up to the ads, but the images provide a foundation for valid marketing today, because consumers are increasingly interested in where and how their produce is grown. Near Globe, Arizona, is a roadside stand for Adam's Antique Apples. The alliteration and schoolboy image are throwbacks to early fruit label advertising, while the emphasis on a pesticide-free ("No Spray" and "Organic") and heirloom varieties ("Antique") reflect modern concerns.

As farmers look back to discarded agrarian methods to produce healthier crops in a more sustainable manner, perhaps they will recognize the important role fruit crate art and agrarian roadside images served in selling the harvest. This marriage of art and agriculture bridges the gap between farms and the people they feed, and may prove as vital today as it was when all produce was organically grown and the crops were genetically diverse.



Knowledge of where and how their food was grown has become more important to buyers. Roadside advertising might help them reconnect them with farmers. Douglas Towne photo.

**A**griculture is going to come back to the center of the American life in a way that we couldn't imagine.  
—James Howard Kunstler, in *Rural Delivery*

# Strachan Donnelley, 1942-2008

**S**trachan Donnelley, a board member and longtime benefactor of The Land Institute, died of stomach cancer July 12. He was 66. Following are memorials from two who knew him.

## **George A. Ranney Jr., president of Chicago Metropolis 2020**

My brother Ed and I were first cousins to Strachan and his brother, Elliott. Our parents decided after World War II to buy farms within sight of one another in the beautiful countryside north of Libertyville, Illinois—land that had been described by an early surveyor as “rolling prairie with scattering timber.” Our mothers took turns driving us every day 12 miles to school in Lake Forest. Hours of roughhousing in the back of the family station wagons kept us cousins close and may have helped develop Strachan’s sense of humor.



Strachan Donnelley

Together we did farm chores, explored, hunted, played ball, swam and fished. Strachan’s sister, Laura, remembers that our shoes were covered with “stuff” from mucking out the stalls of various horses, cows, sheep and goats and set us apart from our classmates. Maybe it helped set Strachan on the nonconformist, “marginalist” path that he was proud of. I believe it was the combination of the landscape and family that evolved over the years into Strachan’s important work on humans and nature.

Strachan’s love for the land around his family’s home, Windblown Hill, became extremely influential. In this past year, he was key to saving the centennial farm owned by the Casey family at the gateway to what is now the Liberty Prairie Reserve. He restored the American Gothic-style Radke farmhouse, where many of us have gone to meetings, and, thanks to him, will continue to do so. Most of all he worked hard to keep Windblown Hill both for family use and for civic and professional gatherings. It wasn’t just houses; he cared about the houses in relation to the land, which he restored and planted to native prairie.

Strachan was one of the first to understand that development of a community, at Prairie Crossing, north of Chicago, could be a catalyst for conservation of the land around it. He always kept the big picture before us. Without his leadership, neither Prairie Crossing, nor the 3,200 acres now legally protected in the Liberty Prairie Reserve

anchored by Prairie Crossing and Windblown Hill, would have been successful examples for conservation.

His reach extended greatly in the last years of his life. He moved far beyond his work at the New School and the Hastings Center. He was on a roll with the Center for Humans and Nature, where he shared his far-reaching ideas with scholars and community activists alike.

Family and close colleagues joined him in May at Windblown Hill to review his work. Though seriously ill, he had come into his own, and in doing so, he inspired family and colleagues to make his concerns their own. Those of us who were there will long remember seeing Strachan, after that last wonderful meeting, arm in arm with his beloved wife, Vivian, as they walked back to Windblown Hill after inspecting restoration work on the rolling wooded landscape that he loved and had done so much to preserve. As they talked, the scene for me embodied characteristics that made Strachan who he was—the life of the mind, shared generously with others; an ethic based on the land and nature; and an “ineffable” love for his family, his friends, and his fellow humans.

## **Wes Jackson, president of The Land Institute**

No metric exists that would allow us to measure this man: Intellectual. Sportsman on the ball fields of Libertyville and Yale. Duck and dove hunter. Fly fisherman. Connoisseur of fine music. Loving husband, proud father and grandfather.

And a superb conversationalist. I think of our discussions:

- Is this idea merely interesting or is it important?
- What do you do when you don’t know what to do?
- An abstraction without a particularity is vacuous. A particularity without an abstraction is dangerous.
- Since we are billions of times more ignorant than knowledgeable, let’s go with our long suit. How do we act on our acknowledged ignorance? (He addresses this as part of a book called *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability and the Limits of Knowledge*.)

Seeing the drawdown of the energy-rich carbon that built and supports the scaffolding of civilization, Strachan and I agreed that humans stand at a moment likely to be the most important one in the history of the species. For help, Strachan was likely to bring up something written by Hans Jonas, Ernst Mayr, Whitehead, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Pasternak, Spinoza, Leopold or Darwin.

We give thanks for his life. His presence and what he made of himself became a gift outright. As Shakespeare had Mark Anthony say of Brutus, the noblest of them all: “His life was gentle, and the elements so mix’d in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, ‘This was a man!’”

# Let's Handcuff the Property Cops

Stan Cox

Susana Tregobov dries clothes on a line behind her Maryland townhouse, saving energy and money. But now her homeowners association has ordered her to bring in the laundry. The crackdown came after a neighbor complained that the clothesline “makes our community look like Dundalk,” a low-income part of Baltimore.

Tregobov and her husband plan to fight for their right to a clothesline, but the odds are against them. Although their state recently passed a law protecting homeowners' rights to erect solar panels for generating electricity, it is still legal in Maryland for communities to ban solar clothes-drying.

Twenty percent of Americans now live in homes subject to rules set by homeowner associations, or HOAs. These private imitation governments have sweeping powers to dictate almost any aspect of a member's property, from the size of the residence down to changes in trim color and the placement of a basketball hoop.

In the view of HOAs, people hand over control of such things when they buy their home, so they have no legitimate gripe. But a growing number of state and local governments are deciding that when HOAs ban eco-friendly practices, they violate the property rights of their members and damage everyone's right to a habitable planet.

In recent years, a dozen state legislatures have passed laws that restrict the ability of HOAs to ban solar panels and solar water heaters. Florida and Colorado now protect the rights of homeowners to replace irrigated, chemically dependent lawns with more natural landscaping that requires little or no extra water or other artificial life support. And Hawaii has become the fourth state to give legal protection to people who dare to defy their HOAs by putting up that most economical of all energy-saving devices, the clothesline.

The more restrictive HOAs cling to outdated standards that treat necessary features of an ecologically resilient future — renewable energy devices, clotheslines, fans in windows, awnings, vegetable gardens, fruit trees, compost bins, natural landscaping — as eyesores to be buried under restrictions or banned outright.

Meanwhile, HOAs commonly mandate large, centrally air-conditioned square footages, two-car garages, lawn sprinkler systems or synthetic lawn fertilizers and weed-killers. You'd think that in 2008, community leaders



would be embarrassed to enforce overconsumption and pollution, but these property cops seem determined to impose their narrow aesthetic preferences on everyone else.

Critics say that only a strong federal law can effectively protect America's 60 million HOA residents from antigreen rules. One bill, the Solar Opportunity and Local Access Rights (SOLAR) Act, is designed to do just that, but it languishes in Congress with only one co-sponsor.

The energy to restrain overbearing HOAs may have to come from the grassroots. As families struggle in coming years to keep up with rising grocery and utility bills, on top of their mortgage payments and HOA dues, they may well put the heat on lawmakers to protect their right to money-saving conservation, renewable energy and edible landscaping.

A small but growing number of HOAs are actually encouraging green practices. But let's see them push harder: Set strict limits on house size, ban pesticides and leaf blowers, maybe even discount association dues for energy conservers. These are rules we all can live with.

They also raise a dilemma. Rousing appeals to individual freedom and property rights can be effective in, say, winning Susana Tregobov her right to dry in Maryland. But as a vehicle for environmental causes, the property-rights argument can backfire. In its more fatuous forms, it can be a favorite weapon of anti-environmentalists, who would doubtless use it to obstruct green HOA rules.

We can debate the details of the rules, but we have to keep our eye on the ball — that blue-green ball we all live on. We must enforce universal rights, not just individual rights. With human-made climatic catastrophe looming, neighborhood groups have an ethical responsibility not only to protect their own turf but also to lighten the burden we all put on an ecosphere that belongs to everyone and to no one.

*The Land Institute sends Prairie Writers Circle commentaries to about 500 newspapers around the country. This piece appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Baltimore Sun, Hartford Courant and Kansas City Star, among other papers. All of the essays are at [www.landinstitute.org](http://www.landinstitute.org), under Publications. They are free for use with credit to The Land Institute.*

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Terry Evans is a photographer and Land Institute board member. Her books include *Revealing Chicago: An Aerial Portrait*. Her Web site, with pictures, is [www.terryevansphotography.com](http://www.terryevansphotography.com).

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University in Virginia and also farms. His two new books of poetry are *Her Secret Song* and *Burning Heaven*.

Steve Renich is The Land Institute's operations manager.

Douglas Towne's art and writing focus on American history and folklore. He lives in Phoenix and serves as editor of the *Society for Commercial Archeology Journal*. He was a Land Institute intern in 1988.

David Van Tassel is a Land Institute plant breeder.

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LR92

**M**en play at tragedy because they do not believe in the reality of the tragedy which is actually being staged in the civilized world. —Jose Ortega y Gasset

# The Hayfield

Jim Minick

In the sweet, heavy smell of alfalfa,  
the clickety-clack of hay-rake joggles  
the music of memory: in this same tractor,  
he once sat in his Granddaddy's lap,  
raking the wind on this same unwinding field.  
To the rhythm of rake, he hums the one hymn  
his dad always whistled with each squeeze  
of udder or bellowed with the thunder's roll.

"Then sings my soul," he boomed  
over black and white backs, tails slapping,  
milker pulsing, his baritone soothing the herd.  
The last swath raked, he turns to watch  
barn swallows dart like eighth notes  
over the field of windrows strung out  
in stanza form, awaiting the next refrain.



2440 E. Water Well Road  
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