

Land Report

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Angus L. Wright Remembrance

SPECIAL EDITION





About The Land Institute



The Land Institute co-leads the global movement for perennial, diverse, regenerative grain agriculture at a scale that matches the enormity of the intertwined climate, water, and food security crises. An independent 501c3 nonprofit research institute founded in 1976, the organization seeks to reconcile the human economy with nature's economy, starting with food. Its transdisciplinary team of scientists and global partners are developing new perennial grain crops and diverse cropping systems that function within nature's limits and researching the social transformation required for a just, perennial human future.

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Land Report

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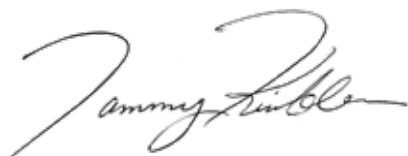
NOTES ON THE SPECIAL EDITION

The Land Institute is experiencing an unprecedented period of change and growth. Last summer, we took a hiatus from producing the *Land Report* to give us time to reflect on the vital role of this publication towards the perennial future we aspire to create.

The *Land Report* holds deep meaning and significance for the history of The Land Institute and its past and current staff, board members, contributors, peers, and advocates. The first issue was published in December 1976. It included writings by Wes Jackson, the seven students in residence at The Land Institute, and was edited by Dana Jackson. Since then, the *Land Report* has featured hundreds of notable writers, artists, researchers, and thinkers during the past 46 years.

Angus Wright was one of those remarkable voices who gave much of his vital energy, attention, kindness, and thinking to The Land Institute. He regularly lent deep insights into agricultural transformation, as seen in his writings and mentions in 20 issues of the *Land Report*. In addition, he served on the institute's board and was a great friend to Wes Jackson. With Wright's passing last fall, we felt it fitting to acknowledge his significant contributions to this publication and our work.

We hope you appreciate this special edition of the *Land Report*. As we evolve the report into a new form that will bridge our collective past and help catalyze our diverse perennial future, we thank you for supporting us on our journey. Stay tuned for more updates from across The Land Institute and the *Land Report*.



Tammy Kimbler

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER
The Land Institute

Introduction

RACHEL STROER, PRESIDENT OF THE LAND INSTITUTE

This special edition of The Land Institute's historic Land Report honors a figure with not only immense importance to the organization, but to the global sustainable agriculture and environmental movements within which The Land Institute operates.

Angus Wright was a key stakeholder in the 1970's environmental movement, a time when major paradigm shifts were evident. During this period, a transition to a more heavily industrialized agriculture and society began to unfold. His involvement in food and agriculture policy and social-environmental activism, through his work with organizations like the Institute for Food & Development Policy and the Pesticide Action Network, helped influence the framework for The Land Institute's vision of a just, perennial transition.

He also served on The Land Institute's Board of Directors for 22 years and was the Board Chair for eight of those years. Angus shared his knowledge and tangible experiences working in this field with Prairie Festival audiences on several occasions.

Angus also influenced future stewards of the land and environment through his role as Professor of Environmental Studies at California State University - Sacramento between 1972-2005 and as the author of multiple noteworthy books.

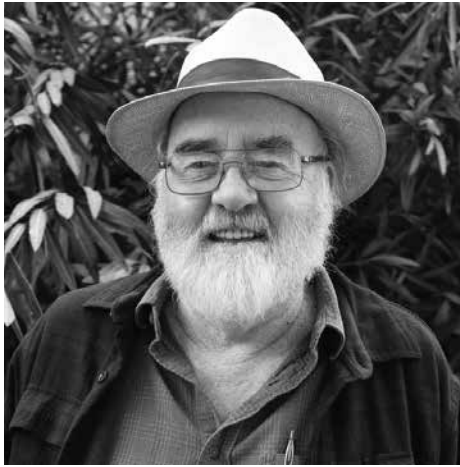
This remembrance seeks to highlight both the character and accomplishments of this influential figure in addition to his contributions to the contextual foundation for The Land Institute and its mission. His work has been, and will continue to be, a driving force in our work as we seek to promote and facilitate a regenerative agriculture transformation centered around perennial grain crops.

When I think of my too short time of knowing Angus and my interactions with him, the word that comes to mind is grace. Even when Angus was tackling challenging conflicts or topics, his presence brought a feeling of grace and peace to the situation. He was someone you wanted to be around, and he felt settled and clear in the way of a great leader.



A Half-Century Knowing Angus Wright

WES JACKSON, CO-FOUNDER OF THE LAND INSTITUTE



Angus Wright, 2019

The floor fight was over in the union gathering of the U.S. Postal Workers. Now the vote. Out of the assembly come these words of passion: “He’s right. His name’s Wright. He’s all right.” The “he” is Howard O. Wright, Angus Wright’s father, a regional vice president of the union.

In numerous conversations with Angus his family would come up. It may be his soul-mate and brilliant author wife, Mary, his son or daughter, brother or sister, mom or dad. I knew his parents H.O. and Thelma best, partly because they lived in Salina, where Angus was born and raised. They all seemed to be raw-boned “forces for good,” not just in the community, but for social justice and environmental concerns everywhere.

Angus was the last of the six kids in a family whose discussions ranged from sources seeming to include everything: biology, history, astronomy, religion, music, whatever. They interrupted one another, had digressions into almost any intellectual endeavor. His parents

were not college people, but they knew where the libraries were. From what Angus has told me of them, this farm couple would write poetry and read late into the night. It makes me think of the poet Robert Frost, who would milk his cow at noon and midnight. You begin to get the drift of what Angus was born into.

My dense connections with Angus go back to the Fall of 1971. That was the year I was made the first chair of the then-recently created Environmental Studies program at California State University, in Sacramento. It was my responsibility to put together something of an interdisciplinary program demonstrating the necessity of a broad understanding of the sources of ecosystem destruction. I had emphasized this during my interview for the job, and this allowed me to cite recent interest in international environmental problems. Angus was just finishing his Ph.D. at Michigan, having focused on Latin American History with an emphasis on Brazil. I wanted him in the program. There were questions about his suitability, as there always should be. When we hired him, a few still wondered what his graduate training had to do with Environmental Studies. It took but little time for Angus’s teaching to put a stop to such questioning.

“As environmentalists, we want to walk lightly on the earth because we respect it and love it. But part of that respect and love is founded on our awareness that other elements in that system have, for lack of a better term, a kind of intelligence embodied in their mutual evolution and adaptation to one another that is more subtle and complex than any substitute we can provide.”

— ANGUS WRIGHT IN *LAND REPORT* 71

This, one of the first Environmental Studies programs in the country, was somewhat unique. Sustaining the intellectual depth was largely due to Angus. But there is more. His home training, mentioned earlier, and educational background produced a man who was truthful, brave, and loving and kind to all, whether they were students, faculty, or friends. For three years, the Environmental Studies program grew rapidly in both student enrollment and faculty.

Fast-forward to 1976. I had been gone for two years to live on a small piece of property my wife and I had purchased along the Smoky Hill River outside Salina, Kansas. When I left in '74 I had planned to be gone for a year but had stretched it into two. Angus, then head of the department, called wanting to know if I was coming back. He said I had to decide—return or resign. It was a hard decision because I had been thinking about starting a school, something along the lines of Deep Springs College, in eastern California. It seemed to me that

would be a better way to educate college-age youth, more designed to meet the mounting problems that were either here already or coming fast. I elected to stay and immediately begin the effort to start The Land Institute.

So, here was Angus in Sacramento, and here I was in central Kansas. These two ways of being in the world could very well have led to drift, but it did not happen. We were friends enough that our interests in each other and a common cause were still there. I needed his ideas again and again, and so countless phone calls, long ones were the usual. Beyond the phone calls I have evidence of his engagement with the young Land Institute, which included his essays, letters, and comments. They are in The Land Institute's Land Report (published three times a year). Get this: Over 18 years, 1981-1999, there were 14 different contributions by Angus. The contributions actually continued into the new century, but I stop there because the point was made. The point is, his engagement reflects encouragement of a small non-profit in central Kansas, in a county of 48,000 people. He was housed in the capital of California, where numerous state and national offices were located, where the lift for environmental change was greater.

Beyond his early family life, university training, and signing on to Environmental Studies in Sacramento, there is more expansion of his influence on Environmental Studies. How so? Look at this: Ph.D. University of Michigan with a dissertation in Latin American Studies

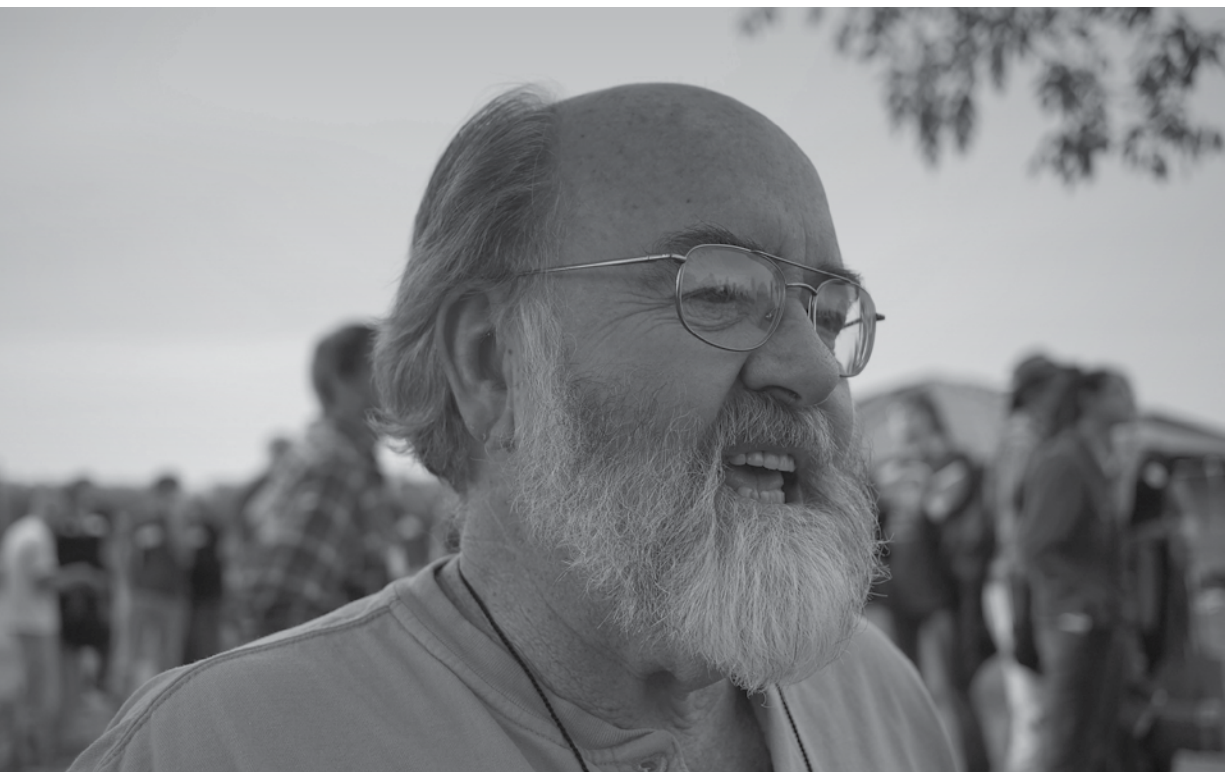
titled, *Market, Land, & Class: Southern Bahia, Brazil, 1890 – 1942*. His specialty included agricultural issues. Mind you now, he came on board in Sacramento in 1972, right when the Green Revolution was on its way to hitting its stride, which was to lead to a doubling and in some cases tripling of the yields in the major grain crops representing some 70% of humanity's food on roughly the same percentage of humanity's agricultural acreage. Norman Borlaug's name was everywhere. The momentum of the past was accelerating the industrial model: more fertilizer, more pesticides, bigger machinery. The scattered examples of land reform were largely ignored, which is to say that social justice issues were largely ignored. Angus sought to look beyond bushels per acre and focused on social justice and land reform, along with preserving soil health. That was the Ph.D. work that just happened to prepare him for our brand of Environmental Studies.

Here is a reality that loomed up before us involving major agricultural issues. Now Angus was positioned to show his stuff beyond the classroom. The University of Texas Press, Austin published his very great book, *The Death of Ramón Gonzalez: the Modern Agricultural Dilemma*, in 1990. That book immediately became a necessity for countless Environmental Studies programs. That was a big leap, but it did not stop there. Historians, social scientists, and more bought that book. He quickly became a prime known authority in multiple fields. Angus never rested on his laurels, though. He co-authored two more books: To



Ricardo Salvador, Wes Jackson, Mary Berry, and Angus Wright at Prairie Festival in 2018

Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil, published in 2003 by Food First!, and here he is in 2009 co-authoring *Nature's Matrix: Linking Conservation, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty*, this time by Earthscan Press of London. With a full teaching load and department head obligations, he continued to write and was active in organizations such as Pesticide Action Network, Food First, the Investigative Mechanism (an independent citizen review board) of the Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development.



*Angus Wright at
Prairie Festival
2013*

Finally, I come to his role as board member and board chair of The Land Institute. Here our long-term friendship paid off in other measurable ways. It was here that all of us were able to see and appreciate his brilliance at conducting a board meeting. Mind you that on this board were several university professor types, who typically seem to have a way of being more prone to spirited opposition before a vote. Angus gave plenty of time to all sides of a debate. He not only kept track of whose hands had gone up and in what order, he would, when necessary, give a summary of the opposing comments, always able to keep order perfectly and with warm grace. At times he would argue strenuously himself, but still allow others to be heard before the vote.

Angus was nine years younger than I, but when the two of us were together I often felt he was the one with the most measured insight. He had a way of being patient with me when I did

not deserve it. I suspect that way of his partly explains the love so many of his students and colleagues had for him.

When such a rare person comes along, I sometimes wonder how it is that such people come into the world. What was their background? I am not thinking about the music whiz or the math whiz, or some such brightness—not them, but the ordinary people like the rest of us.

Part of what he was about had to be a carry-over from a very different environment before he was born. Angus's parents had been farmers near Steel City, Nebraska, during the Great Depression, during the Dust Bowl era. It was the time of Roosevelt. Angus's parents knew what Roosevelt's New Deal had done for them and others. They knew why policy—underscore that word, policy—was necessary for civilization to work, indeed, how our democratic institutions

can provide help for people and the land. They carried that with them to a town setting before World War II, with five children already. Angus was a tag-along. They had a new life away from a hard-scrabble farm.

So, how to end this piece of writing about my friend? Shakespeare would have something to say, something that matched the utterances of a Mark Antony eulogizing the assassinated Julius Caesar:

*"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"*

Yes, that is true and good, but it still does not seem enough. Sure, no summation of Angus Wright could ever be "enough." How about we just go with the words of that postal worker whose name we do not know. Angus was one of the people whose influence is with us today. He was someone we can all be proud of, our brother. Most of the time he was right. His name was Wright. He was ALL RIGHT. ▪

Meeting of The Land Institute Board 2016. Back row, L to R: Pete Farrell, Jan Flora, Sam Evans, Eric Gimon, Kenneth Levy-Church. Front row, L to R: John Simpson, Angus Wright, Donald Worster, Wes Jackson.



A Place for Elijah:

Thoughts on Natives and Wanderers

ANGUS WRIGHT, THEN CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM
AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

*This speech was presented at Prairie Festival
1995 in Salina, Kansas, and later published in
Land Report issue #54*

How does a native son come back home to speak on “becoming native to this place?” Although I was born in Salina and spent my first eighteen years here, I have now spent a little more time in Sacramento, California than I have in Kansas. I think I may be as much a wanderer as I will ever be a native.

I do believe in natives, though. Because I am a wanderer in much of my work, I have by necessity imposed frequently on the hospitality of natives, whether indigenous people of southern Mexico and Coastal Brazil, or sidewalk natives as fondly dedicated to the rich urban life of Mexico City and Salvador de Bahia, Brazil as people here are to Kansas. That hospitality has been again and again something rich and amazing – something that speaks powerfully of those qualities of being native that I most admire. I have eaten the last chicken because an ancient Mixtec woman insisted that I do so, as she sat and watched, having herself dined on tortillas and salt. I have eaten the last plate of potato stew in the high Andes – my host

insisted and said without making much of a sacrifice about it, “we, of course, are used to hunger, while you are not.”

But while I believe in being a native, I am a little afraid of the self-conscious project of becoming native. Any historian must be. For just as imperial conquest has been one of the most ecologically and socially devastating forces in the world, so has the fanaticism of nativism been a powerfully destructive force. Like all love, the love of home may be a jealous love, paranoid, intolerant, and violent; or it may be generous, tolerant and giving. There are few things more needed in this world than the love of place, but love can be blind, and we need to keep our eyes open. What I want to talk about is not whether it is better to be a wanderer or a native, but about the relationship between two principles – cosmopolitanism and localism – embodied in wanderers and natives.

Though it goes against stereotypes of the Midwest and of the 1950s, I was raised a pagan in Salina by my mystic-pagan parents. Every year while most Salina folk were preparing Easter, we went to the Passover Seder dinner of our Jewish friends the Cushmans, the family of the librarian. Jerry Cushman was a wanderer who

made the natives of Salina bloom with creativity, art, and learning. My parents explained that both Easter and Passover were just organized religion's way of stealing the fire from the older and more honorable pagan festivals to celebrate the rebirth of life evident in the greening and blossoming natural springtime world.

One of the things I remember about the Jewish Seder was that the door was always left open a crack, no matter what the weather, and a special wine cup was filled at an empty place-setting. Jerry Cushman explained that this was for Elijah, the prophet and traveler who might stop by at any time and who must be welcomed. I just loved this idea. I imagined what Elijah might look like. First he was the obvious wild-eyed, bearded, ragged old prophet, wandering out off the prairie. Then I imagined others – a woman carrying a message of peace throughout America, or a survivor of a Nazi death camp, or one of Jerry's funny librarian friends full of dirty jokes, or an unemployed railway worker, or a poet, or a man who just lost his farm. It wasn't hard to imagine these people – my parents were always inviting them in off the streets to share our home and meals throughout the year. For me, Salina was a place through which Elijahs traveled all the time, and

“Bring it home to Kansas. If agriculture continues to be overwhelmingly driven by international market forces, Kansas will almost certainly remain a breadbasket to the world. But wouldn't it be a good idea, as Wes Jackson has proposed, to produce those grains by a way more consistent with the health of prairie soils and prairie life, and wouldn't that better support Kansas communities?”

— ANGUS WRIGHT IN *LAND REPORT 72*

we were to welcome them—it was part of the Cushman's religion and part of ours, too.

Although the world is full of such wanderers, humans now for the most part live in settled communities, like Salina. Those communities all account for a very special piece of earth that needs to be intimately known and nurtured, year in and year out. Our agricultural and industrial technologies must with great urgency be bent to the “expectations of the land,” in Wes Jackson's favorite quotation, after “consulting the genius of the place.” For communities to be decent and just places to live, there must be stability of institutions, some shared assumptions, some characteristics and locally appropriate way of doing things—in a word, a culture. I think that this is what The Land Institute's work is about, and I hope it is what much of the American and planetary environmental movement is about.

Perhaps unfortunately, we have to think and work on this task of becoming native very



consciously. It doesn't "just come naturally." For one brutal fact, we people of European extraction have just a historical moment ago seized a large number of the world's local places from the previous and time-honed natives by force of arms, disease, slavery. We have to remember this raw truth. We can seek to become native because we killed the natives; or most of them, anyway. It won't be undone anytime soon and it won't help to feel guilty about it. But it does define the task. We aren't the natives outside of Europe in any significant historical sense. Not yet. Making it happen is a difficult responsibility.

The first and enduring task of becoming native to a place is to know its history and to conceive of what exists here and now and what is to become in historical terms. Otherwise, you remain a thief forever, no matter how long you stay in the same place, because you are taking without consideration for what you owe. Anthropologists tell us, and my experience has confirmed it to me beyond my doubt, that the

first principle of indigenous cultures is reciprocity. For everything taken, there must be a return, for every return there must be another gift. Our community is held together by our debts to each other and to nature. The eternal exchange of gifts defines the work we are to do in the world. Elijah's cup acknowledges all those debts we have not yet been given the opportunity to repay.

Our culture possesses the land of America partly because we have forced others to pay the price of conquest. Have we repaid our debts to the Native Americans? On the contrary, the conquest continues. In one of Salina's best motels I talked to several of the room staff and janitors. They were all from Mexico, and initially terrified of someone asking them questions in Spanish. Many of the Mexican people working in the United States are indigenous people of Mexico, for whom Spanish is a second language. They are Mixtecs, Zapotecs, or Mixe from Oaxaca; Puripechua from Michoacan; or Tzetzales and Tzotziles from Chiapas.

You will see a lot more of them. Why? NAFTA and the fabulous productivity of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa farmers virtually guarantee it.

NAFTA not only phases out tariffs and quotas on U.S. grains exported to Mexico, it also phases out support prices and subsidies given to Mexican grain farmers. While there are large agri-business firms in Mexico that will compete successfully, the millions of small farmers in Mexico will not be able to compete. They need at least twice the price the Kansas farmer needs per bushel to survive. They are going to be coming off the land, by the millions. Some say that the already rapid rural-urban exodus will be burdened with another four or five million people in the next decade. Others say there will be more like fifteen to twenty million. As they leave, many of the last and richest indigenous cultures of the Americas will bow to complete conquest at least. The descendants of Mixtecs who twelve hundred years ago made magnificent gold and jade jewelry traded by early American wanderers all the way up to the ancestors of the Iroquois people of New York state will be changing sheets in the Holiday Inn in Salina. The descendants of the people who domesticated corn and developed thousands of varieties that modern corn is based on will be picking truck crops in Douglas and Johnson counties for the suburban shoppers of Kansas City and Topeka.

What does this have to do with being native to Kansas? It's not simple. One basic thing seems clear, however: becoming native cannot mean

becoming parochial. It cannot mean becoming less concerned with national and international politics. It cannot mean whining about how NAFTA will hurt Kansas without also asking how it will allow Kansas farmers and city people to profit from the collapse of native cultures in Mexico. Right out on motel row along I-70 and I-135 there are lonely wanderers in this town, as in virtually every sizable town in the United States. What do we have to do with them? Are the terms of reciprocity ones of dignity and respect, even of mutual recognition of who we are and who they are?

“Every local action interacts with large global, social, and ecological forces.”

— ANGUS WRIGHT IN *LAND REPORT* 72

We need to look at the economic and political policies that are guiding our international system. They are often called neo-liberal. This is, speaking only a little roughly, a euphemism for laissez-faire capitalism, a return to the robber baron and colonialist days, where the new barons and colonialists are the CEO's and chief stockholders of the world's major corporate entities and private and public investment banks. While these policies have stoked a powerful engine of growth, in most nations they have led to increasingly wide disparities between rich and poor, and just as dramatically, between rural and urban. They have greatly

“My parents taught that it is a fine thing to live on this rich Kansas soil and to celebrate the gifts of the prairie summer. But they also taught that we will only deserve it, and we will only have a decent, peaceful community when we behave with responsibility and dignity toward others.”

— ANGUS WRIGHT IN LAND REPORT 54

magnified and hastened history's greatest exodus—that of the world's rural people to the cities. They have sharply increased the gap between the world's poor nations. In the United States itself, the concentration of wealth has become much more dramatic over the last three decades, with one percent of the population now owning forty per cent of our wealth. And everywhere, this process of economic concentration has come at the expense of rampant environmental exploitation. There will be no place in the world for strongly-rooted native economies and cultures unless we fight back politically at every level against these policies.

This task, like many, does begin at home, and we must work with the spirit and the vision locally that we would have prevail globally. More than a century ago in central Nebraska, my great-grandfather killed Indians with his own rifle to make comfortable room for his own family. I would be somewhere else now if he hadn't. We cannot change that past. But twenty-five years ago, my parents volunteered thousands of hours to make Air Force brides from all over Asia citizens of the United States. They did everything they could to make these people, often despised by good Salinans, into informed voters and English speakers. They

made dozens of young Japanese and Chinese women into Salina natives. But I am convinced that when my mother and father did this, they also made themselves more deeply native to this place. They said, we have a community here now, and it must be a community of tolerance, of mutual respect, of dignity for every person. My parents taught that it is a fine thing to live on this rich Kansas soil and to celebrate the gifts of the prairie summer. But they also taught that we will only deserve it, and we will only have a decent, peaceful community when we behave with responsibility and dignity toward others.

My pagan parents, who had studied and submitted themselves to the disciplines of several religions and ethical systems, challenged us to work out our own beliefs. In this stage of my life, I am thinking that humans need two kinds of gods. We need the very local, very concrete and specific earth divinities we can see and touch and taste, embodied in the feel and smell of prairie soil and in the perfume of the prairie flower. The pagan gods that pull us into the here and now and that set the rules for what it is to be a native to a place to know it and to love it.

But we also need the gods of wandering tribes. Those who lay out principled commandments, universal rules of human behavior. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not covet, lie, steal. Christ told us we would never live without the sin of breaking these commandments, because our lives are filled with complicated dilemmas and temptations. So we need universal concern and generous love, as well as specific, pagan love of our own place and our own people.

To argue for many gods would be hopelessly heretical to the original Elijah. He would have no tolerance for my message. But wanderers are often maddeningly contradictory. As natives, you must prepare the cup for many wanderers, and learn how to work cooperatively with others who would like to stay rooted in their own land and culture all around the world. Each wanderer, and each native has his own story. Each of us are wanderers across a different stretch of earth, native to wild places and tame. We each make our own different and sometimes irritating demands.

Have you prepared our place, have you filled our cup? And for my friends, Jose and María? •



Industrial Agriculture and Green Revolution Impact in Central & South America

LAND REPORT ISSUE #40

Through his extensive work in Mexico and Brazil, Angus Wright obtained key insights about the role of industrial agriculture and the Green Revolution in shaping the socioenvironmental landscape of Central and South America. He received a Fullbright Senior Research award in 1987 to investigate pesticide abuse in Northern Mexico's Culiacan Valley in the state of Sonora. Wright also engaged with audiences at The Land Institute on multiple occasions, including his talks at Prairie Festival in 1983 and 1987, in which he discussed how modern agricultural practices and international markets were largely responsible for driving agrochemical overuse, economic distortions, habitat destruction, and worker violations that impacted our neighbors to the South.

With these dire facts in mind, Wright worked incessantly to further understand and disrupt these inequitable systems. In addition to spending over 300 hours speaking with journalists to highlight these issues and raise awareness of large-scale problems going unnoticed, he also worked directly with the World Wildlife Foundation in an effort to convince the Brazilian government to invest in nature-based agricultural solutions that considered sustainable cacao production and the recognition of the nation's rich forest preserves.

"By bringing together analyses of both good and bad examples of land use in Brazil, Mexico, and the United States, Angus hopes to address fundamental questions concerning the social manipulation of agricultural resources, and in doing so, to promote wiser and more just forms of agriculture. •





Local and Rural Vitality in an Increasingly Global Society

LAND REPORT ISSUE #74

Angus Wright astutely observed the tension between the expansion of the international marketplace and the health & livelihoods of local, rural communities and cultures that existed within them. He wisely noted that “every local action interacts with large global, social, and ecological forces,” illustrating how local communities at the heart of agricultural production would feel the ripple effect of a highly demanding and extractive global economy that was continuing to unfold.

In his Prairie Festival talk from 1992, he drew attention to the need for land reform in Brazil to subdue the negative impacts felt by rural peoples as a result of their governance by international forces that disrupted natural and social systems. Wright also weaved these themes into thoughts about the future of Kansas agriculture and agricultural communities. In order to defend against local disruptions associated with Kansas’ designation as a global breadbasket, he insisted that agricultural production in this region would need to produce grain in a way “consistent with the health of prairie soils and prairie life,” a recommendation with deep ties to his friend and colleague Wes Jackson and his work at The Land Institute.

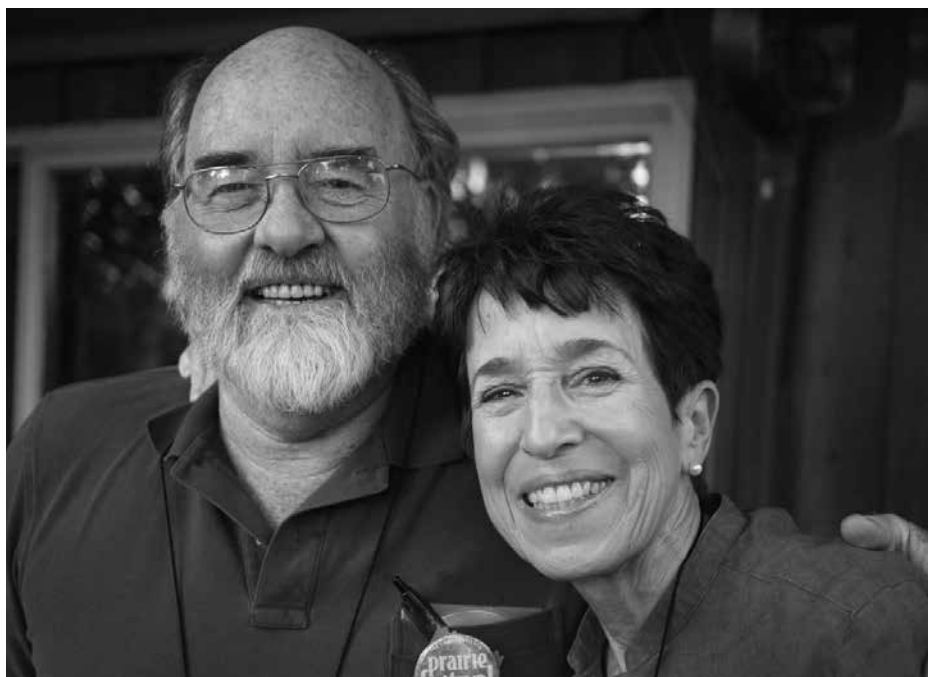
“Can the requirements of the international market fit with the conditions for healthy and stable rural communities in some harmony with the natural environment? I think the answer is certainly yes. But it cannot be done without determination, sacrifice, and intelligent understanding by all of us, for all of us are involved in the modern dilemma of local communities increasingly governed by international forces.” •

Reflections & Remembrances

from Friends, Family, and Colleagues

Last night, as I held his hand and sang to him, Angus, my dear, sweet husband of thirty-seven years died without pain or anxiety, passing peacefully into the golden light that lies on the other side of this life where I hope he will sit forever by the river he loves watching the wind ripple the currents and the shadows of the cottonwood leaves flicker and dance.”

— **MARY MACKEY,**
SPOUSE OF ANGUS WRIGHT



Angus Wright and Terry Evans, Prairie Festival 2013

Iknew Angus only through The Land Institute. Immediately upon my joining the board in 2014 Angus, who was chair at the time, extended a warm welcome. He became a mentor of sorts to me, helping navigate the practices of the board as well as initiating me into the rich history of The Land Institute. I grew to appreciate his deep knowledge of and profound commitment to The Land Institute. I will always remember him as a gregarious, warm, compassionate chair who ran meetings with grace. He was the person on the board looking to drink a beer on the eve of meetings. During those moments I enjoyed hearing of his years growing up in Salina, the labor organizing his father did, and his tedious work at the Eisenhower Library. Many laughs were had. As chair, he held a poise that served all of us well, and he showed great sensitivity to opening the floor to all points of view. Lastly, I thoroughly enjoyed talking with Angus about his scholarship, his field work, our common roots at the University of Michigan, and his deep love of Brazilian music. I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to work so closely with him during his final years on the board.”

— **KENNETH LEVY-CHURCH,** THE LAND INSTITUTE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2014-PRESENT),
BOARD VICE CHAIR (2018-2020)

Just wanted you to know that you have played an important role in my life. First was your recommendation that I join the board of The Land Institute, it has been a great privilege to be on the board and to witness the tremendous progress that has been made. Your even-handed leadership in the transition is something to be proud of. But just as important, I was able to appreciate and experience your loving care for the organization, its staff, and board members. You have many academic accomplishments to savor, as well. Wish we could have another wide-ranging discussion of Latin America.

— **JAN FLORA,** THE LAND INSTITUTE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2002-2020),
BOARD SECRETARY (2006-2017),
EMERITUS BOARD MEMBER
(2021-PRESENT)

“Sad indeed. The Land Institute as an organization and the individuals who constitute it have lost a wonderful man. Angus was a rare combination of high ideals, broad erudition, and infectious good humor. Tough-minded analyses delivered with humanity, wit, and selflessness. A good person and an excellent colleague.

Angus was a first-rate person all around. An outstanding scholar and analyst who knew everything about Brazil and at least eighty percent of any other subject touching on science, ecology, history, and the foibles of human behavior.

Lucky for us, all this knowledge and analytic horsepower was punctuated by laughter. Angus employed and enjoyed funny asides and anecdotes to a degree that I’ve never encountered in any other person of such erudition and industriousness.

Wonderful leader, wonderful colleague, wonderful friend.”

– **CONN NUGENT**, THE LAND INSTITUTE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (1987-1989, 1996-2016),
BOARD CHAIR (2000-2010), EMERITUS BOARD MEMBER (2018-PRESENT)

“Although I’ll keep watching, I don’t suppose I’ll encounter a better or more savory metaphor than Angus Wright’s affinity for the American River. A whole world, and a whole worldview, made up its watershed. A good-humored but intense and unmistakable patriotism surrounded it. It flowed on, season after season – perhaps it still does.

Angus was indispensable. His reason for being, as far as I can tell, was to act for the integrity of “this beautiful world,” as I once heard him say, and for the wellbeing of all those who live in it. Possibly better than anyone I know, he could put the pieces together: to feel deeply and fully, to think and theorize rigorously, and to act effectively that which is felt and thought. (I once clocked him completing a full iteration of that process in under 45 seconds.) Angus Wright’s scholarship on the human and ecological consequences of the worst misfires of the dominant Global North agricultural system, and the seeds for hopeful and viable alternatives, is a crucial and highly visible part of his legacy. But focus below the fold too. For Angus, to act meant to act collectively, and with indifference to the spotlight. He was involved in board leadership at three really critical sustainable agriculture organizations, groups that were essentially the vehicles for the radical action his writing called for: The Land Institute, Pesticide Action Network, and FoodFirst. These roles were not merely honorific or custodial in nature. They were hard intellectual and emotional labor, exerted especially in seasons of greatest organizational need, when there were relationships to be built and relationships to be mended and momentum to compound and not to lose. Angus did this work with kindness, creativity and skill, and with the placid relentlessness of a river. And it made all the difference in the world.

– **FRED IUTZI**, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE LAND INSTITUTE (2016-2020)



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