


Local Futures

The Newsletter of the International Society for Ecology and Culture



Localization Around the World

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Director

It's encouraging to see how quickly the localization movement has spread around the world: it is mushrooming in the US, in Australia, in Europe, and in Japan. More and more people now recognize that allowing businesses to roam the world looking for the cheapest labor means a loss of job security for the majority. They see how wasteful it is to transport huge quantities of identical products back and forth across the world, just so corporate middlemen can profit. They realize that something is fundamentally wrong when apples from the UK are flown to South Africa to be washed and waxed, then flown back again to be sold to UK consumers; when fish from Norway are sent to China to be deboned, then flown back to be sold in Norwegian supermarkets. People are even beginning to wake up to the fact that economic growth is making them poorer, not richer.

However, it is a race against time: giant banks and businesses continue to push the entire world

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still further into an economic model based on debt, consumerism, and a denial of ecological limits.

The globalized economy is inextricably linked to climate change, loss of species, unemployment, poverty and social breakdown. I believe that seeing these connections is very empowering, because it simplifies things: instead of having to address a whole range of huge problems, a focus on the economy allows us to address their common root cause. And it lets us see how localizing the economy can help solve all those problems, simultaneously.

Economic localization has become something of a buzzword recently. But it's much more than a slogan: it's a systemic and far-reaching



alternative to the monolithic and top-down structures of the global economy. As we move towards more localized economies, we are saying 'no' to the consumer monoculture and actively encouraging both cultural and biological diversity. We are helping to reduce pollution and unemployment, personal stress and global conflict.

With the spread of the localization movement, people are working to strengthen their economies from the ground up. They are moving away from dependence on fossil fuels, long-distance trade and big business, and supporting more local, independent businesses instead. One exciting new campaign in the United States is 'Move Your Money,' which encourages people to move their savings out of Wall Street banks and into community banks. There is also the '3/50 Campaign', in which people commit to spending at least \$50 per month at three local businesses – a shift that can help to revitalize local economies across the country. The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) – a network of local businesses seeking to withdraw their support from the corporate global economy – now has branch networks in over 130 US cities. These efforts in the North complement efforts in the South to revitalize diverse local cultures and economies. Via Campesina (an international network of small farmers) represents 400 million members, and continues to gain strength.

I am very proud of the role played by ISEC over the last three decades in helping to foster this worldwide localization movement. Please support us so that we can continue to do so during the critical times ahead.



Learning for a Change: the new Roots of Change curriculum

**Brian Emerson,
Programs and Outreach Coordinator**

It has become increasingly apparent that 'business as usual' is no longer an option. But as Helena points out in "Decolonizing Our Minds" in this newsletter, mainstream society remains captive to a set of assumptions that diminish our ability to bring about real and lasting change. Enhancing our historical and economic literacy is an important first step toward freeing ourselves from the stories that constrain our ability to be agents for positive change. To this end ISEC is pleased to announce

the release of our new and improved Roots of Change curriculum.

The readings include some of the world's leading political, economic and ecological thinkers: Vandana Shiva, Wendell Berry, Joanna Macy, Jerry Mander, Bill McKibben, Mike Davis, David Korten, David Orr, Juliet Schor, Sulak Sivaraksa, John Bellamy Foster, Howard Zinn, Helena Norberg-Hodge, and many others. The curriculum encourages a broad analysis of the origins and workings of the global economy and promotes discussion about the impacts of corporate globalization on communities around the world. The emphasis is on education for action: helping participants see the big picture, unearth root causes and identify strategic positive actions. For every critical exposé, we include new ideas and tangible, instructive, living solutions.

How It Works ISEC helps set up small study circles (usually six to twelve members) and provides a series of readings to generate discussion. Study circles usually meet once or twice a month to discuss the readings and forge strategies for effective local action. There are no 'teachers', though most groups choose one of their members – sometimes on a rotational basis – to act as facilitator. ISEC staff are available throughout the program both for logistical and intellectual support, and to facilitate the transition from education to action.

Since the program began in the early 1990s, participants have gone on to initiate inspiring projects in their own communities – from farmers' markets and coops to alternative currencies and local food councils. In doing so they have joined millions of others around the world who are resisting the destruction of people and the planet, while renewing their local economies, communities and cultures. Rather than leaving things to the 'experts', it's time to heed the words of Alice Walker: "we are the ones we've been waiting for".

Start a Roots of Change group today We officially relaunched the Roots of Change program on November 30th, 2009 and have already received interest from communities across the world – from small farmers, students and professors in the USA, to City Council members in the United Kingdom, to individuals as far away as Kazakhstan, India, Cameroon and Malaysia.

Visit us online to learn how to start a study circle in your community: www.isec.org.uk

Or send us an email for more information:
infoUK@isec.org.uk (UK | Europe | Africa)
infoUSA@isec.org.uk (The Americas | Asia)

Greed: Is it Nature or Nurture?

Helena Norberg-Hodge

In discussions about the state of the world I so often hear people say: "It really comes down to greed, doesn't it? Human beings are naturally greedy...." I see things differently. I see our problems as emanating from a particular culture, rather than human nature.

I was, in a sense, forced to see things this way because of the dramatic changes I witnessed in Ladakh: what I saw made it clear that the desire for consumer products – that greed itself – was being created by outside influences. In my native country of Sweden I also saw how in the 1980s, the opening up to outside media – with its advertising, pornography and violence – had a profoundly negative effect on young people.

The assumption that the root cause of so many problems goes back to human nature makes it very difficult to see a way out of our crises. When greed and an insatiable craving for more 'things' are seen as intractable features of human nature, then an economy based on consumerism will seem equally natural. But consumer desire is highly artificial: for almost a century now, big business has been employing ever more sophisticated techniques to create the 'need' for new fashions, for new gadgets, for the latest model car. These methods actually foster psychological insecurity and self-rejection, along with the belief that consumer products will relieve the resulting pain. Children are especially vulnerable to these messages. They hanker after the latest trends in the hopes of gaining the respect and love of their peers. But they usually find that getting these things only leads to greater competition, envy, and eventually, separation – meaning even deeper insecurity and more vulnerability to the next advertising message.

This is one way that the globalized consumer culture disconnects us from ourselves, from one another and from the natural world. It blinds us to what is essential for happiness and wellbeing. It takes away our sense of belonging – to community, to place, to the earth – and replaces it with empty desire. Far from being natural, greed – and the consumer culture that it supports – is

something that has been foisted on us and our children.

It may sound all too obvious, but it seems to me that we need to actively challenge the notion of innate human greed, and just as actively embrace the notion that our need for love and connection is deep and abiding.

Localization is so important as a counterweight to the global consumer culture because it's about rebuilding those lost connections. It's the best way to heal ourselves, our societies, and the earth. When people turn towards each other and nature, healing can occur remarkably quickly. Angry, violent teenagers improve remarkably during six weeks in the wilderness, learning basic skills and community building. Even violent prison offenders have been transformed when given the opportunity to dig their hands into the earth in prison gardens. Projects like these show the enormous benefits of experiencing a sense of connection, reciprocity, and the deep satisfaction that comes from identifying with others and with the natural world.



Ancient Futures film tours Turkey

Ancient Futures featured as the closing film in the first ever Sustainable Living Film Festival in Istanbul, Turkey, which took place in November 2008. Organized by the Sustainable Living Collective, the film festival has now toured to Samsun with future showings planned in Karlskrona.

New Websites

Stay tuned in the next few months as we unveil the overhauled and polished ISEC website and introduce an additional site dedicated to our new film *The Economics of Happiness* (www.theeconomicsofhappiness.org). Special thanks to Brian Emerson for getting the film website off the ground, and Akiko Kaneko for her technical dexterity and generous support in revamping the ISEC website.

News from the UK

Lin Etherden, Administrator
Sophia Elek, Project Assistant

Promoting local food was the focus of many of the activities organized by our UK office during the past year. Local Food Program Coordinator Ed Hamer, who updated the materials in the UK Local Food Toolkit in 2008, has now added to it a 38-page booklet titled 'Food Security in the 21st Century: Information for Action.' The booklet describes how – beginning with the Industrial Revolution – our food supply has become ever more globalized, centralized, and dependent on fossil fuels and other inputs. Most importantly, the booklet also shows how relocalizing our food economies can reverse those negative trends.

After representing ISEC at Via Campesina's International Conference in Mozambique (see our 2008 Newsletter) Ed helped to set up Reclaim the Fields – Via Campesina's European youth delegation. This organization represents not only young people who work in agriculture, but those who hope to return to the land despite the many economic obstacles in their way. Ed was instrumental in organizing the group's international youth camp, held in Southern France in September last year. In December 2009 he attended the UNFCCC climate conference in Copenhagen where he took part in actions organized by Via Campesina and Reclaim the Fields, and reported on the conference for *The Ecologist* magazine.

During the past year Ed also helped set up a Community Supported Agriculture scheme in Chagford, Devon. The CSA, which will provide 50 households in the community with a weekly box of ecologically-produced seasonal vegetables, is a pilot project that hopefully will be replicated across Dartmoor.

Former LFL participant Sophia Elek also joined ISEC UK to work on our Local Food program in 2009. Sophia has helped organize community seed swaps in the local area, collaborated with the 'Campaign to Protect Rural England' to map the local food webs between farmers, retailers and consumers, and spent time with local farmers spreading information about the benefits of CSAs. She is currently working with consumers and farmers to start a 'Food Hub' in Totnes, Devon. The Food Hub aims to offer a direct marketing opportunity for local farmers to sell produce to local residents – specifically those who have previously considered local food as 'out of their price range'. Sophia has been seeking funds for ISEC to continue bringing the new, updated version of

the Local Food Roadshow to venues around the UK.

In other news, Carole Powell, ISEC UK's Administrative Coordinator for the past eight years, recently retired, and we all wish her well in her new life! Since her departure the UK office has been managed by Lin Etherden, who enjoys being in contact with Learning from Ladakh and Roots of Change participants, and fielding the many enquiries from all over the world about ISEC's work.

The Buzz from Berkeley

Brian Emerson

ISEC's Berkeley office has been reborn! We've moved to a new space in the Ecology Center, recruited two new interns, hosted several events and have been busy updating our Local Food and Roots of Change Programs (among other exciting projects).

Events In Summer 2009, Helena gave a talk and showed a few clips from our film *The Economics of Happiness* to a crowded Brower Center auditorium in Berkeley. To say the event was well received would be an understatement: it ended with a standing ovation.

In November and December we organized several talks by West Bengali scientist Dr. Debal Deb – a member of our informal localization network – on climate change, traditional crop diversity and food security. We hosted Dr. Deb at two events at the University of California-Santa Cruz in collaboration with the noted agroecologist, Steve Gliessman. A third talk was held in Berkeley in collaboration with the Ecology Center.

Local Food Program From January to April 2010 our interns, David Drayton and Julia Bond, did an immense amount of research for the local food program. Over the next few months we will transform this impressive pool of raw facts and figures into an array of helpful tools for local food activists. Stay tuned!

Roots of Change ISEC also hosted another intern, Stefanie Lorenz, from the German Development Cooperation (GTZ). Stefanie was superb to work with. She helped Brian streamline and improve the Roots of Change outreach materials, and is beginning work on a German version of the curriculum. She also worked with Helena and Brian as they began laying the groundwork for ISEC's next big international conference, dedicated to the formation of an International Alliance for Localization.

Under Our Umbrella

Obtaining non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service is difficult, time-consuming and expensive, and for many small NGOs a better option is to find an established organization to act as their fiscal sponsor. We currently sponsor three such groups, all of which do work consistent with ISEC's core mission. Here are brief reports from each on their recent activities:

TUC Radio

Maria Gilardin

TUC Radio produces radio programs on topics the mainstream media usually glosses over, including globalization, local resistance, and Native Nations. Our programming in 2009 included stories on Western Shoshone efforts to halt gold mining in their region, on community-based Bush Radio in Cape Town, South Africa, and on the theory and practice of community money and barter.

We recently moved from San Francisco to a rural part of Mendocino County. The new radio studio is in an off-grid straw bale house on a 30-year old "back to the land" ranch. Neighbors are involved in longstanding alternative energy, agricultural, gardening, transportation and building projects. Both towns near the ranch have vibrant localization movements.

During the building of my house I gained experience in passive solar design, photovoltaics, solar cooking and water heating, mini hydro-power, hydronic floors, earth floors, mud plaster etc.. Now that I live here I have begun interviewing the gardeners, builders, and visionaries in the area to capture, by audio and video, their local knowledge. For more information, see www.tucradio.org

Aqueous Solutions

Jessica L. Geheran

In 2009, Aqueous Solutions joined the Haiti Biochar Project – an initiative to research, develop, demonstrate and deploy sustainable biochar technologies in Haiti. (Biochar is a form of charcoal that not only filters water, but sequesters carbon.) We will also provide consultation on the use of biochar in composting toilets for ecological sanitation and soil improvement.

Aqueous Solutions is also beginning a program to develop appropriate technologies for drinking water and sanitation facilities at migrant schools in northern Thailand. We will initially be working with the Thoo

Mweh Khee School, which provides education and health services for the children of displaced ethnic minorities and migrant peoples. Currently, drinking water and sanitation conditions at Thoo Mweh Khee are poor (e.g. septic tanks overflow into open ditches on the property, resulting in a high incidence of disease).

Aqueous Solutions was recently honored to receive the 2009 iBoP Asia Competitive Research Grant, awarded to researchers developing science and technology-based solutions to serve the "base of the pyramid". The grant will enable us to continue developing carbon-mediated filters for the removal of pesticides from contaminated drinking water sources in Thailand. For more information about our work, see www.aqueous.org

Thousand Varieties

Peggy Reents

This year at Pun Pun (Thai for 'Thousand Varieties'), we ran trainings for groups ranging from Thai university students and Southeast Asian monks to American students and Burmese farmers.

We also hosted a 10-week international internship program, a 3-day workshop for Thai volunteers on the importance of seed saving, and sponsored a 'Sustainability Study Trip' to visit other groups in the ecological movement in Thailand.



We also created a small local organic farming/seed saving group, traveled to Burma to support an alternative education center, and led two trips to India to help a women's center to build an earthen health clinic. Members of the Pun Pun community also attended an agro-forestry training in another part of Thailand.

Infrastructure at Pun Pun center, where our core community has grown to thirteen members, includes a two-story modern adobe style family home, which we use to demonstrate the benefits of this comfortable and durable building technique. This year we increased our rainwater collection capacity and expanded the seed saving gardens and food forest/perennial garden system. Approximately 1,000 visitors visit the center annually. For more information, see www.punpunthailand.org.



The Ladakh Project

Alex Jensen
Ladakh Project Coordinator

Mindful Travel in Ladakh

This summer, thanks to the dedicated work of two Spanish volunteers – Veronica Hillo and Oscar Portillo – ISEC completed and published an ‘eco-guidebook’ to the town of Leh. The booklet was distributed widely in Ladakh this summer, and is also available as a PDF download from our website ([/www.isec.org.uk/articles/eco-guide-for-leh-city.pdf](http://www.isec.org.uk/articles/eco-guide-for-leh-city.pdf)).

Our reason for producing this book can be found in

“I am very impressed with both your movies and inspired to start something on a small scale in my country. Thank you so much!”

– Visitor to Ladakh

the introduction:

“At the moment, the presence of thousands of tourists in Ladakh is exerting a huge strain on the region’s scarce resources. However, it needn’t be so. There are many ways in which the negative impacts of tourism could be reduced, by supporting the traditional

practices which have sustained Ladakhi culture over thousands of years.”

As part of our research for the book, we followed the trail traveled by Leh’s trash each day. It begins in the dawn hours, with hoards of livestock greedily (and lethally) dining on mounds of festering mixed waste from the previous days’ market activity, which have been heaped unceremoniously around town. Municipal garbage trucks arrive, staffed by immigrant workers from Jammu or Bihar. These poorly paid (and worse protected) workers scoop up the waste and haul it away. This “away” is an innocent desert valley about five kilometers out of town, and out of sight. We were shocked by the scene we encountered there (see below).

The issue of waste is a near-daily topic of controversy during our discussions with tourists at the

Women’s Alliance Centre. Many Westerners denounce the ‘dirtiness’ of Leh – and India generally – and identify the problem as one of waste management. The solution, they argue, is simply to install more rubbish bins. The argument we make in our workshops, and now in the eco-guidebook, is that simply improving garbage collection is not the answer: reducing the creation of garbage is far more important.

Publishing the eco-guidebook was part of the larger Tourist Education Program, which continued with vigor this summer. We not only brought the ‘Mindful Travel in Ladakh’ brochure to visitors from all over the world, we also exposed hundreds of people to thought-provoking documentary films and lively discussions. In addition to the daily screenings of *Ancient Futures*, we also screened the rough cut of our film *The Economics of Happiness*, as well as a few new documentaries, including *Life and Debt* and *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*. *The Economics of Happiness*, paired with Helena’s post-film talks, generated much spirited discussion and debate. Scores of visitors expressed great enthusiasm and encouragement for the project and provided useful critical feedback, which has helped inform the final edit.



Discarded plastic water bottles in Leh’s landfill





Learning from Ladakh

The Learning from Ladakh (LFL) project attracted three dozen participants – from Canada, England, Germany, Spain, Japan, Italy, Australia, Austria, France, and the United States. In addition to the home-stays and workshops on issues of development and globalization, we also organized crafts workshops ranging from apricot oil-making to traditional pottery.

For the latter, participants were able to engage in the entire process of Ladakhi ceramics, from the collection and processing of the clay and sand, through to the pot-making and firing. This was led by one of Ladakh's last living traditional potters, Azhang Tsephel from the village of Likir.

“The experience of staying in Stok village provided me a great lesson. I was always comparing the life in the village with the life in my city, and there were many things I realized by doing so. Above all, I was glad to learn how important it is for people to live with nature.”

– Akiko Keneko

The Women's Alliance

In recent years, we have collaborated with WAL to establish a local food café, which serves tourists throughout the summer with traditional Ladakhi fare made from fresh, organic, local ingredients. As the pressure increases on farmers in Ladakh to use imported agricultural chemicals, providing a consistent market for organic produce has become ever more crucial.

Although the Women's Alliance successfully pressured the local government to ban polyethylene plastic carrier bags in 1998, plastic waste continues to accumulate for the simple reason that such plastic bags represent but a fraction of the total of disposable plastics. We will be working in conjunction with WAL to extend awareness of this issue to Ladakhis as well as tourists.

The continued presence of WAL and the growing interest in ISEC's work from both tourists and Ladakhis, is testament to our positive impact in the region. However, there is much more to be done. For example, this year, we discovered that Pepsi Corporation had enlisted farmers in various villages to grow potatoes in what is called a



LFL participant crushing clay



WAL member expressing apricot kernel oil



'contract farming' agreement. Apparently, Pepsi India has found in Ladakh a convenient answer to a supply problem during the monsoon in other agricultural regions of the country, when potatoes are out of season. Pepsi supplies the potato seed and the proprietary fertilizers, and the harvest is earmarked for Pepsi to export out of Ladakh for snack crisps. The farmer becomes, in effect, a cog in Pepsi's commodity supply chain. Proponents of this system say it is better than the 'insecurity' of local markets or subsistence production. Unfortunately, as experience elsewhere has shown, this sort of corporate dependency actually exposes local farmers to notoriously fickle whims of the bottom line, in addition to the fluctuations of global markets. Moreover, in this arrangement, both physical wealth (soil, water, potato, biomass) and the bulk of financial wealth are siphoned out of Ladakh and captured by Pepsi. The ultimate irony is that the same Ladakhi farmers who grew the potatoes for Pepsi could eventually be re-purchasing their own potatoes - now transformed into greasy crisps and packaged in a plastic bag emblazoned with the 'Lay's' logo - at a considerable markup.

As the only organisation in Ladakh with a truly global perspective and decades of first-hand experience in Ladakh, ISEC is uniquely poised to resist these trends and to support renewal of local culture and agriculture. In the coming years, we hope to raise the funds essential to intensifying our efforts to adequately meet the ever-increasing encroachment of corporate globalization in Ladakh.

Notes from an LFL participant

Mairéad Ní Chaoimh

To get to my village I undertook the bumpiest jeep ride of my life, from the Ladakhi capital, Leh, with the other volunteers. The land was parched, and the farther from Leh we got the rougher and more potholed the roads became. After nine hours in the back of an open jeep on rough terrain my body was aching. I felt as though I had landed on another planet. The landscape was lunar-like and utterly barren, with sheer crimson- and chalk-coloured cliff faces. We spiralled up and around mountain after mountain, holding on to each other for dear life as the jeep skimmed alongside cliff edges.

Amazingly, there is life in this parched land. Having negotiated our way past a number of jagged mountain passes, we came upon a ribbon of villages strung out



LFL participant Orla McConville with host mother

along the bed of a valley. One of these villages, Hemis, which in the local language means the Land of Big Rocks and Juniper Trees, was to be my home. When I arrived I was christened Dolma by my host family, as Mairéad was too complicated for them to pronounce. They welcomed me with open arms and treated me as one of their own.

The mother of the family had a smattering of English, but the granny, Amale, had none; she loved nothing more than to talk animatedly to me in her native tongue, seemingly unaware that I understood not a word of her Tibetan dialect. After a while I started talking back to her in English, and even though she understood nothing she nodded away as I spoke. Her appearance, to me, symbolised Ladakh, an odd mix of the traditional and the modern. She wore the traditional native dress but teamed it with a baseball cap.

The variety of the work was refreshing. Picking apricots formed the bulk of the work. We stoned the fruits by hand, then spread them on sacks on the roof of the shed to dry. In winter they would be traded for salt and wool. They were the most divine apricots I had ever tasted. There were over 30 varieties, and each tasted different. The key was to choose one at optimum ripeness for maximum tasting pleasure.

My experience was a deep and rewarding one, and it gave me access to a culture that a regular tourist would not get a sniff of. The most memorable image I have taken

with me is the night sky of Ladakh. Up that high you really are close to heaven; the clarity of the mountain air is astonishing. On the roof of the world the stars are a blanket right above you, so close you can almost reach out and touch them.

Excerpted from Mairéad's article in The Irish Times.

LFL participant wins Student Diplomat of the year award

Nicole Barasse, 2009 Learning from Ladakh participant, entered the annual Student Diplomat competition of NAFSA: The Association for International Educators with a short film on her experience in Ladakh. She was selected as the winner by both an expert panel of judges and votes tallied from the public for each finalist's video. Her winning contribution can be viewed at NAFSA's website: www.nafsa.org/publicpolicy/default.aspx?id=16649 or at ISEC's website: www.isec.org.uk/pages/learningfromladakh.html.

Artist supports WAL

Oil and watercolor painter David Bartels has produced one of the largest and most varied collections of contemporary oil paintings of Ladakh. They include landscape and figurative works and feature lesser known locations such as the Suru Valley and Zanskar. His work has been exhibited in galleries around the US, Europe and the UK, including Birdwood House in Devon, near the ISEC office and the UK India Business Council in London. These exhibitions support the Women's Alliance of Ladakh. www.davidbartels.co.uk/



Snow Mountains Nun and Kun

Resurgence of interest in *Ancient Futures*

New edition launched Eighteen years after its original publication, a new US edition of *Ancient Futures* was published last year by Sierra Club Books. The new edition, subtitled *Lessons from Ladakh for a Globalizing World*, includes a new Afterword by Helena that brings readers up to date on events in Ladakh, as well as recent trends in the world at large. Numerous events were held in conjunction with the launch, including bookstore readings, radio interviews, and public talks.

UK Prime Minister reads *Ancient Futures* As part of a 'Global Reads' Campaign, organized by the UK's Guardian newspaper and The National Book Tokens scheme, David Cameron, the new prime minister of the UK, picked *Ancient Futures* as his favorite book. (see www.guardian.co.uk/books/competition/2010/mar/05/1). 36 other books ("inspirational reads providing invaluable insights into new cultures and countries") were selected by celebrities, writers, and professionals in the publishing industry. These books were then put to a public vote (www.nationalbooktokens.co.uk/globalreads/). At the time of going to press, *Ancient Futures* was ranked 5th out of 36 – ahead of Barack Obama's *Audacity of Hope*, Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, among others.

Reader reviews of *Ancient Futures*

"I was bowled over by this book. ...Time after time I found it necessary to stop reading and reflect on ideas presented. I'm looking forward to reading it again." – M. Dixon, Ireland

"I learned of this book in reading Three Cups of Tea. I enjoyed that book, but enjoyed this one even more." – Allen Hoppes, Spain

"Important, necessary, engaging and masterfully written – this book was a treasure to read. Indeed, it was an awakening."
– J.W.K., Japan

"Once in a while a book comes along that changes one's perspective forever. Ancient Futures is such a book. I haven't been the same since." – Pam Hanna, New Mexico

Local Food: A Success Story

Helena Norberg-Hodge

Within the many localization movements underway around the world, initiatives to promote local food are by far the most successful. They already provide a powerful counterweight to the corporate push for monocultural, industrially produced, genetically-modified food.

By and large, government policies currently favor big agribusiness. Commodities suited to large-scale production receive heavy subsidies: corn, for example, is so heavily subsidized in the US that cheap corn by-products find their way into virtually every product on supermarket shelves. Subsidies are also devoted to promoting commodity exports, and to the transport infrastructure needed to link distant farms with corporate processing facilities, distribution centers, and supermarket chains. Meanwhile, government funding supports research into pesticides, genetic modification, and heavy equipment suited to monocultural production. The end result is that our taxes help make old, processed, plastic-packaged, genetically-altered food from the other side of the world cheaper than fresh, local, organic food.

A systemic understanding of the multiple problems with the global food model is absolutely essential if we are going to pressure our governments to change these policies. So far, the organic movement has largely ignored the issue of subsidies, instead arguing that it is reasonable to pay more for healthier food. At the same time corporate interests happily promote the notion that local, organic food is 'elitist' because it costs more.

Agribusinesses also play on our sense of obligation to the world's poor, claiming that only industrial agriculture can feed the planet. But the truth is that smaller farms with a high degree of diversity produce far more food per unit of land than large-scale monocultures. If the quantities of everything – from milk, eggs, meat, and grains to vegetables, berries, nuts, and fodder – produced on small farms are contrasted with the yields of single commodities coming from large monocultures, it becomes apparent that diversification actually increases the amount of food and fiber that can be gained from a particular plot of land. And maintain fertility can be maintained without fossil fuel-based fertilizers.

Monocultures, on the other hand, are 'efficient' only in their use of labor: they systematically reduce the number of people on the land, replacing them with heavy equipment, chemical inputs, and fossil fuels. In other words, monocultures are a recipe for increased unemployment, resource pressure, pollution, and CO2

emissions.

If people were actually surveyed on whether they would prefer their taxes used to reduce the price of corporate food – nutrient deficient and laced with pesticides – or to make local, organic food affordable for all, I have no doubt they would choose the latter.



Global to Local Outreach

With economies worldwide still reeling from the global financial meltdown, and with the Copenhagen climate talks failing to produce anything substantive, people have been looking deeper for answers. With these and other crises still unfolding, more and more people have become receptive to ISEC's perspective – particularly our promotion of economic localization as a systemic solution-multiplier. ISEC staff continued to press this argument in countless venues around the world. Here are some of the highlights:

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Director

- Helena led two sessions at a Boston University conference on 'The Future of Food: Transatlantic Perspectives'. The sessions were titled 'Farm to Fork: The Global Food Chain', and 'What Is "Good" Food? The Ethics of Eating.'
- As part of the launch of the new edition of *Ancient Futures*, Helena spoke at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, during "Vivre a l'échelle locale", a festival celebrating local food, culture and knowledge. Helena spoke on 'Living on a Local Scale: Learning from Ladakh.'
- At the Mountain Film Festival in Telluride, Colorado, Helena gave presentations titled, 'How has the global food system come about and how can it be changed?' and – along with Bill McKibben – 'Why locally-grown food is so essential'.
- Helena screened previews of *The Economics of Happiness* at the Aspen Center for Physics in Colorado, and at the Brower Center in Berkeley, California (see page 4).
- Helena acted as a juror for the Buckminster Fuller Challenge, helping to choose the 2009 recipient of this prestigious \$100,000 award.

- Helena also spent several weeks lecturing in Thailand, where a new edition of *Bringing the Food Economy Home* has just been published. At Chulalongkorn University and Chankasem University, she gave talks on 'Local Food and the Economics of Happiness'. In the province of Khon Khan, she spoke at a conference organized by the local government, which is now interested in localization and in promoting alternatives to conventional education.

- In Shikshantar, Udaipur, India at the Institute for Rural Management and the National Institute of Design, she spoke alongside Indian lecturers and professors who are using ISEC materials in their work.

Steven Gorelick, US Program Director

- At the 'Vivre a l'echelle locale' festival in Montreal, Steve screened a rough cut of *The Economics of Happiness* and also led a workshop on local food trends in neighboring Vermont. Several of the participants at the workshop have continued the discussion by visiting Steve at his farm in Vermont.

- At the SIT Graduate Institute, in Brattleboro, Vermont, Steve presented the *Ancient Futures* film to students in sustainable development.

- At Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, Steve screened a rough cut of *Schooling the World*. This excellent documentary, produced and directed by Carol Black and Neal Marlens, looks at the impact of western-style schooling in Ladakh, and features extensive interview footage with Helena. We hope to make the film available through our website in the near future.

Doug Tompkins visits ISEC Australia

Doug Tompkins, one of the most influential environmentalists in the world, visited Helena and her husband, John Page in Australia last year. He and his wife, Kristine Tompkins, have conserved over 2 million acres of wilderness in Chile and Argentina, more than any other private individuals. Through his Foundation for Deep Ecology, he has also published a series of large, photo books on various environmental issues. These include *Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy*; *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*; *Welfare Ranching: The Subsidized Destruction of the American West*; and *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry*. He has now turned his attention to promoting localization.

He arrived in Australia after spending a month

aboard one of the ships of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, chasing Japanese whaling boats near Antarctica. Six hundred people turned out to hear Doug speak at an ISEC-organized event in Mullumbimby, near Byron Bay. Doug also presented his new film *The Next Economy*, which highlights the importance of localization in creating a "biologically sustainable economy." More on the Mullumbimby event at www.mullumaction.org/moviechannel/dougthompkins.html

Flow Fund Grants

Each year from 2002 to 2005, ISEC received \$100,000 from the Flow Fund Circle to distribute to worthy projects around the world. The total amount was divided into equal portions and distributed to five trusted individuals and organizations who share ISEC's perspective and values; each of these in turn chose several grassroots groups to receive small grants of \$5,000 or less. Below, one of these five, Yoji Kamata, describes the projects he chose.

We distributed Flow Fund grants to groups in Nepal, Mongolia, and the Philippines. In Nepal, we supported a youth camp to foster notions of deep ecology and 'deep democracy' for future leaders of the region. The curriculum at the camp included such topics as "Food and Peace", "From Global to Local", and "Development and Peace: Learning from Ladakh". So far, over 200 youths have participated in the project.

A second project in Nepal aimed at the revitalization of traditional Tibetan Medicine. The program was run by the Lo-Kunphen School in the Mustang District – a region very similar to Ladakh. With Flow Fund support, the school was able to offer courses leading to a Certificate in Amchi Medicine, and to recognition as Community Amchi Assistant. The school is now preparing for the next level of education, Durra pa, to be run jointly with the Himalayan Amchi Association.

In the Philippines, we helped fund an Indigenous Education Program for the Mangyans, the indigenous peoples of the Province of Oriental Mindoro. In addition to a curriculum focusing on indigenous knowledge, the program produced booklets containing local folktales, which are not only used in classrooms but are enjoyed by adults and elders as well.

In Mongolia, we helped fund a project that provided veterinary services to help ensure the quality of hides and skins of herders' livestock, leading to a diversification of their incomes.

Yoji Kamata is Chairperson of the Tokyo-based Atelier for Development and the Future (ADF). He also coordinates the Ancient Futures Network in Japan.

The Economics of Happiness

Our latest film, *The Economics of Happiness*, offers not only a big-picture analysis of globalization, but a powerful message of hope for the future. The thinkers and activists we interviewed for the film – Vandana Shiva, Bill McKibben, Samdhong Rinpoche, Zac Goldsmith, Mohau Pheko, and many others – come from every continent, and represent the interests of the great majority of people on the planet today. Their message is unambiguous: in order to respect and revitalize diversity, both cultural and biological, we need to localize economic activity. They argue that a systemic shift – away from globalizing economic activity and towards the local – is an almost magic formula that allows us to reduce our ecological footprint while increasing human well-being.

When people start connecting the dots between climate change, global economic instability and their own personal suffering – stress, loneliness, insecurity, depression – there is the potential for a movement

that will truly change the world. Featuring a wealth of diverse perspectives, the film illustrates these often hidden connections. We go beyond the narrow analysis of the mainstream to show that antagonism between human needs and the needs of nature is not inevitable.

We have found the process of making this film incredibly inspiring. Simply to see the multitude of grassroots movements afoot has been heartening – a testimony to human goodwill and resilience. We hope that *The Economics of Happiness* will bring the same inspiration to viewers around the world.

It provides insight, hope, reassurance and above all, motivation to join in the growing localization movement. Bringing the economy closer to home can not only save us from environmental and economic catastrophe, it can help us to re-discover those essential relationships – both with the living world and with one another – that ultimately give our lives meaning and joy.

**“Stunningly mind-blowing footage!
May it succeed in publicising the great need for localisation.”
– Audience member,
India**

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Edward (“Teddy”) Goldsmith, who died on August 21, 2009, at the age of 80.

Teddy should go down in history as one of the key figures in the environmental movement. For us, he was a soulmate and close friend. We will forever miss his wisdom, his erudition, his ability to make people re-think their most basic assumptions. And we will miss just as much that twinkle in his eye, the sense of fun, the stories that made you laugh till your body ached.

Thank you, Teddy, for everything you brought to our lives.

~ Helena Norberg-Hodge, John Page, Steven Gorelick

Photos: p1,3 J.Page; p6 A.Jensen; p7 A.Appleby

p8 O.McConville; p9 D.Bartels; p10 K.Steele



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Printed on recycled paper