

As I relate this to Inga Haugen's words, I'm struck that the farm families whom I was privileged to meet this past year have *not* forgotten that culture of connection to work or connection to land.

An idea coming to me in part because of Berry's book and in part stemming from my own life experience is that this connection is not intellectual, but is one that is buried somewhere in the body. By putting the rhythm of real work—farm work—back into the picture, we restore one honest body connection to all life. We create muscle memories. The hands know how to hold a hoe; the feet know how to spade soft soil. It is possible that the work itself—the rhythm of daily chores, seasonal rhythm of planting or harvesting and birth to death rhythm of the animals—creates in a young person an inner reality that must then *always* be dealt with. Later, those urges we refer to—the seemingly inexplicable urges—may instead be simply the harvesting of this muscle memory, an inner connection ensured by work.

**"If I don't have some connection to the dirt, I'll go nuts!"**  
declares Inga Haugen. ❖

# Seeing Changes on the Land

**P**aul Gruchow, hailing from Worthington, Northfield, or Two Harbors, Minnesota, once painted the picture of rural education and "what we teach rural children." An essay by this name, first a 1990 lecture at St. Mary's College in Winona, was published as a chapter in *Grassroots: the Universe of Home*.

*"The point is that rural children have been educated to believe that opportunity of every kind lies elsewhere and that the last half century's rural experience of failure and decline has been largely due to the incompetence, or irrelevance, of rural people."*

Gruchow wrote against "any economy that sees people as an expendable resource," and exposed any number of myths driving such an economy. He may have shocked the audience at St. Mary's College in 1990, saying "These are lessons we teach our rural children today: that their parents were expendable and that their duty is to abandon their dreams and become cogs in the industrial machine . . . [furthermore, that] if they expect to amount to anything, they had better leave home."

If Paul Gruchow were still alive (and how I wish he were!), I'd call him up and see if he still believes this, or how he'd apply his theories to the population of this set of interviews. Without him, I am forced to draw my own conclusions.

First of all, I assume that this movement adding creativity on the land in the 1970s and 1980s created a different set of expectations for those who farmed sustainably. They began to know, indisputably, that people on the land were *not* expendable, that labor and ingenuity were key to sustaining the soil, and that imagination is the grist of the creative mill of land management.

Katie Fernholz reflects on the beginnings of her dad's (Carmen's) commitment to organics on their Madison, Minnesota, farm. **"Well, our farm was conventional at first. The story goes that one year there was not enough money for chemicals, so Dad just tried it without them. Back then he was going organic without a peer or mentor. It was his own idea."** ❖

Carmen's son, Craig, talks about how he and his father would watch the neighbors plow. **"There's a family out our way [who own] about 2,000 acres and they have a big eight-wheel humungous tractor and I often saw him going out. Usually if it had rained, the next day you'd get up and look out and you could see where they'd gone the day before because the tractor had packed the soil down so much. Those little details differed from the way we did things, so we'd ask. At the end of the harvest season what others usually did was till up the soil using a moldboard plow, and what that did is take the earth and furl it up, flip it upside down. What Dad always uses is a chisel plow, and**

**that makes grooves in the soil. You can see the difference because we kept the corn stubble on the ground so that during winter when you have these 40 mph. winds coming from the northwest, the snow is stopped by this crop trash. I remember once when I was ten or so, a person with a snowblower was down in his ditch, snowblowing soil back onto the field because the ditch was so black. That's those moldboard plows! We never had that problem. Never like that."** ❖

Creativity thus caused new expectations on the land. Second, I know that the generation of parents who farmed in curves and new crops or cows on grass were bucking not only the accepted scientific research about efficiency, but also the local culture of their towns and valleys. Since they were already change agents, their children (my interviewees) were buffered by a generation and shown courage. They watched changes on the land, learned from them, and came to believe in them by example.

Melissa MacKimm recalls that her dad, Dwight Ault, made changes on their Austin area farm that actually made her feel more secure. **"I was in my early teens, you know, a time where most kids aren't paying attention to much outside their own circles. I can remember thinking all my friends' farms were bigger and more progressive, but then in the 1982 farm crisis, thinking 'whew,' we're not like that, our place will be more stable."** ❖