



LOVE FOR LAND

Farming, Art, Health, and Spirituality Explored

Spring 2019

May the road rise to meet you,
may the wind be always at your back,
may the sun shine warm upon your face,
may the rains fall soft upon your fields,
and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS...

New Jersey, affectionately known as the 'Garden State,' is home to thousands of individuals whose lifeblood is the soil of the land itself. Due to the rampant rise of industrialism and the consequent decline of green spaces, the heyday of agrarianism seems but a distant memory in the minds of many New Jersey urban and suburbanites. However, there are initiatives in central New Jersey that align with the broader, contemporary environmentalist movement, which urge communities to think globally and act locally. As it stands now, it is easy to see that the systems that dictate our future as a society are, in their essences, unsustainable.

In this publication, we present images, thoughts, feelings, and observations from conversations with local agrarians as we seek to better understand our collective relationships to land and labor, and how these relationships can play a role in transformations towards sustainability, joy, and justice. We acknowledge that 'sustainable' relationships to land are very individual and do not manifest in physical forms. As such, our publication draws from a number of perspectives on farming, and looks into the multiplicitous ways individuals relate to issues of land and labor. We view the individuals mentioned in this publication as vehicles for change and positivity, and their diverse perspectives are examples of the dire need for the valuable input offered by local, often-underrepresented voices.

To our revolutionary future,
Nadeem Demian
Emmy Bender
Sofie Kim

LAND AS ART

The question “What is art?” has befuddled humankind for centuries. It seems that the ecology of human interactions with nature is rarely considered in this debate. Yet for some who spend their days intimately with the land, labor and farm-planning can be seen as a form of artistic expression. The land we stand on has been used and abused for too long. Perhaps farmers who see the deep beauty in everyday conception of life in the soil might aid us in developing a deeper respect for the land, grounded in intrinsic, practical, and aesthetic value.







"PLANTS ARE ART, GOD'S ART...

...AND THE COLORS...

...SO MANY BEAUTIFUL COLORS ON THIS FARM.”



“Farming gives me another form of communication...

IMAGINATION OF WHAT CAN BE

that’s what connects the two things—farming and art”

LAND AS HEALING

The idea “Love for Labor” comes from our experiences of learning and building relationships with our hands in the soil. Agricultural labor can not only serve to improve the health of the land itself, but it can also improve our own physical and mental health. Our work with the soil grounded us both literally and intellectually. A common thread that appeared through our conversations with local agrarians was that their close relationships with land are mutually beneficial. By playing a role in local food systems, communities can improve their collective health and nourish the land, while simultaneously promoting equitable ideas of labor and food.





“If you’re a pianist and you’re working on a piece, you’ll practice that piece thousands and thousands of times to get it right . . .



. . . but with farming, you only get one chance every year. If you’re farming for thirty years, forty years, fifty years, you only get that many chances to get it right .”

“When you share the work you
lighten the load, and farming is a
heavy load to carry.”


* * *



A photograph of a garden under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, a person in a dark hoodie and blue jeans stands with their back to the camera, looking towards a garden bed. The garden bed is filled with green plants and has several white stakes. To the left, there is a large hoop house structure made of white plastic and wooden stakes. In the background, another person in a blue shirt is visible, and a line of trees marks the horizon.

“The farm life is
HEALTHIER and HAPPIER”

“When it comes down
to my bodily health
and my weight,
and my joints,
this farm is a blessing”



"You can run on the street, run in the park, why pay money to run in the air conditioning?"

"Everytime you go

do farming,

you move every

part of your body

LAND AND SPIRITUALITY

For agrarians, working with the land grants them the ability to better understand what it means to live a 'Good Life.' If we are to move towards revolutionizing food movements, and shift from the industrialized mindset of "doing great" to a more community-oriented mindset of "doing good," it is important to explore interdependent ways of relating to land. Ideas of joy and justice are ubiquitously present in religious settings, and in our class we have worked to draw out the connections between self-fulfillment, labor, and land stewardship. Although the relationships between farming and spirituality are not always as explicit as they are at the Princeton Theological Seminary, there are plenty of other agrarians who similarly find a deeper meaning in their labor with the land. For these individuals, spiritual experiences inform how they navigate building community around the land, and can ultimately prove useful in deconstructing widely-held cultural norms.







"The Farmer sows the word"

Mark 4.14

"Farming is not just a job where you can earn a living. There has to be an underlying passion, because if there weren't, you wouldn't be able to continue—

WHO WOULD DO SUCH A JOB?

It's this spiritual enrichment that I get from farming that keeps me going."



“It’s a real deep spiritual thing...
almost like a fantasy to me...
I pray and thank God that I can work
out here, and being out here is almost
like something that I created”

“Local is farmers
growing trust”

- Barbara Kingsolver

Revolutionizing food systems requires collaboration; this is no task that can be done in isolation. In our spaces of learning, we have learned to be vulnerable and grow trust with our classmates, our teachers, our agrarians, our friends, and in the land in Central New Jersey. Revolutionizing food systems also requires a certain kind of optimism, and trusting our surroundings has helped us gain that optimism.

As individuals, we are grateful for the opportunities we have had to explore ourselves and the possibilities of what can happen when passionate people come together around a common goal and on a common ground. Over the past twelve weeks, we have had to ask ourselves many difficult questions, and sometimes these questions may have made some of us uncomfortable, but we are surely better for it.

A special thank you to everyone and everything that has taught us to actively care more deeply about our surroundings—these experiences will live on in our memories and in our future actions towards joy and justice.



May these seeds be a blessing to you,
to the land,
and to all the creatures of the land.

And may the good seeds of the course
continue to grow in you.

Like beds of rich dark soil that provide life-giving sustenance for plants that will bear fruit, there are some folks who have touched our hearts with their wisdom and whose words are found in the pages of this book:

Charles Huang, Chia-Sin Farms

Derrick Branch, Capital City Farm

Lauren Nagy, Cherry Grove Cooperative Farm

Stephanie Harris, Stonehedge Farm & NOFA-NJ

Thank you so much. May your wise words and careful stewardship of the land and community continue to touch the lives of others who might learn from your actions and taste the fruits of your labors.

