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Writing the Land: Foodways and Social Justice

Edited by Lis McLoughlin, PhD

Published by
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Northfield, MA

Opening Thought: Food is Not a Thing

Food is not a thing. But our dominant culture thingifies food; it's packaged and offered to us as a thing we find in the grocery store. That's the primary way that people think about food and interact with food, on the weekly trip to the grocery store, rather than walking out your back door to see how much the spinach has grown, or putting food scraps into the soil that are going to nourish this plant that is then going to nourish you and your family. That kind of connection to food that is very material and energetic is really not there for a lot of people now. So when you talk about reproduction—reproducing— think about how the ways that food is grown also reproduces a relationship with food and a relationship with land. You grow food as a thing, then it's going to be consumed that way. And it's not reproducing this relational, "I nourish you, you nourish me" kind of reciprocal Relationship. You grow food native to the ecosystem and for a local community, then You grow relationships of interdependency.

—*JuPong Lin,*
(excerpt of a conversation with Hyperion Caca Yvaire)
August 2022

Introduction Foodways and Social Justice: Writing a Complex Web

Part I: Conserving, Restoring, and Creating Food-Producing Lands and Communities

Each chapter of Part I tells a story of a land conservation organization—how and why they are passionate about conserving food-producing lands. Every one of these organizations goes about it slightly differently day by day on and in the ground. They all care deeply about the combined fate of humans and land: past, present, and future. Each holds a piece of the larger puzzle of how we keep agricultural land producing food sustainably, and how we interact with nature, the land, and one another fairly.

Part II: The Arts, Foodways, Communities and Conserved Lands

Part II of this book, explores the important role the arts play in embodying, communicating, and enhancing the connections among foodways, land conservation, and social justice. Each essay tells a story of an arts or agricultural organization or artist and how they contribute to this work.

Overall, there are many ways to do good work in this arena. But none of them is simple.

Every organization focuses their energy in one or more key areas depending upon the values and passions that drive them: justice, the arts, individuals, community, land, agriculture, and food production. These concepts are a tangled web that is enhanced and strengthened by the many intersections of threads that cross and recross, making a strong network.

Join us in celebrating the complexity of ways people can work together ethically, practically, and with joy and hope to conserve food-producing lands for all of nature—ourselves included.

—*L. McLoughlin, PhD, August 2022*

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**PART I:
CONSERVING, RESTORING
AND CREATING
FOOD-PRODUCING LANDS
AND COMMUNITIES**



Photo: Open the Gate by Mary Swander

SUSTAINABLE IOWA LAND TRUST



Iowa

Our Mission:

To permanently protect Iowa land to grow nature-friendly table food.

- Red Fern Farm—Mary Swander
- Jupiter Ridge Farm—Rita Mae Reese
- Grade A Farm—Paul Brooke
- Phoenix Farm—Rebecca Wee
- Driftless Hills Farm—Dana Maya

Witness

by Dana Maya

Oaks & cottonwoods
alfalfa fields, nettle, milkweed,
dogbane, scrawny apple seedlings,
a fox's skull

the land remembers the forest that came before

empty pig pens, hollow hoop houses
the skeletons of farm machines

(some dreams are perennials, passed on—
others are left behind, still others
are starters—experiments in generation)

a sudden downpour, then
light, air, & sun mix to make
an ordinary glory: *Rainbow!*

the arc a massive bloom,
shooting from soil to sky. It
compels us off the porch to stand

in the field & point: how many before
us stood this same ground
to see this sudden harvest?

Tender

by Dana Maya

Tender as in one who cares
for the pigs, the sheep, & the delicate eggs,

Tender as in how to touch
chamomile, peppermint, nettles, alfalfa,
soft skin of strawberries

Tender as in the word for payment asked &
payment offered. Each open hand, receiving.

Tender is soil & sell, culture & coin.
Farm keepers, food eaters:
Keep tending, keep tending, keep
tending.



Photo: Tender Shoots by Dana Maya

AGRARIAN TRUST



AGRARIAN TRUST

Nationwide

During the next two decades, it's estimated that more than 400 million acres and \$1.4 trillion of farmland will change ownership. Agrarian Trust's mission is to support access to land for the next generation of farmers. Toward this end, Agrarian Trust supports existing Agrarian Commons 501(c)(2) land holding entities, while expanding the Agrarian Commons model across the U.S., enabling communities to hold equity and authority, create shared ecological stewardship, and support land access for diversified, regenerative agriculture. We see this model as a necessary and innovative approach to address the realities of farmland owner demographics, wealth disparity, farm viability, and all who are excluded and marginalized from equity in land, food, and community.

-West Virginia Agrarian Commons:

New Roots Farm, Fayetteville, WV—Amy M. Alvarez

-Middle Tennessee Agrarian Commons:

Long Hungry Creek Farm, Red Boiling Springs, TN—Julie Sumner

-Meadowlark Hearth Organic Farm:

Scottsbluff, NE—Duane L. Herrmann

-Central Virginia Agrarian Commons:

Callie Walker Farm, Petersburg, VA—Leona Sevick

-Puget Sound Agrarian Commons:

Black Seed Agroecology Farm & Village, Bayview, WA—Catalina Cantú

Alternative Paths Forward by Noah Wurtz

In an age defined by abstraction, where currencies like bitcoin make fortunes and politics unfold in the frenzied glow of the digital forum, land, our oldest and most reliable companion, remains at the center of everything.

Despite this, land is itself viewed in increasingly abstract terms. While billionaire investors see land as a stable asset to secure their wealth against volatile marketplaces, agribusinesses see it as a factory, calculating inputs to maximize outputs with little concern for the land's long term health, or its connection to the broader community. Even average Americans ascribe to an ideology of private land ownership, prioritizing innate individual rights to land over its real ecological, cultural, and economic connection to the broader landscape. Such an individualized, profit-oriented model of land use has led to the rapid loss of agricultural land, and the widespread destruction of our shared environment.

If we are to create a more resilient and equitable system of land tenure, we need new ways of thinking about the land, along with agile strategies that allow us to put these forms of thought into practice.

There has already been some incredible work done by regenerative and agroecological farmers, who connect their work explicitly with the overall wellbeing of the planet, and the creation of a just and equitable food system. Yet a full realization of this relational approach to land stewardship is impeded by a simple, but devastating fact. As land becomes increasingly expensive and concentrated in the hands of a few owners, farmers and their communities are presented with fewer and fewer opportunities to manage their land holistically. Instead, private ownership reduces land to a commodity that can be bought and sold at will, erasing the more complex interwoven values of land as a community and ecological asset and replacing them with a single monolithic imperative—profit at all costs.

It is more profitable, for example, to develop farmland into a new shopping center or residential development than it is to farm it. Today, nature appears to be losing to parking lots. As a result of real estate development, agricultural land is disappearing at a rate of 2000 acres per day.

Private ownership has led to the widespread misuse of land for the benefit of a small pool of real estate developers and agribusinesses, while disproportionately favoring a white, land owning class. Without widespread and equitable access to land, the work of farmers and communities seeking to create a more just and sustainable way of living on the land will continue to be severely limited.

Healthy land is essential to the survival of all life on Earth, and too valuable to be lost to development. A more wholistic ecological and ethical understanding of land begins with a more inclusive decision-making process. There is no need for us to start from scratch. Existing models, such as community land trusts and the Agrarian Commons are gaining momentum and serve as alternative paths forward, both for our species, and for those with whom we share the great natural web.



F.A.R.M.S.



South Carolina

Our mission is to provide rural family farmers with legal support while reducing hunger in the farmers community

- Rosa Parks Farmers Market—Doris Frazier; Jillian Hishaw
- The Males Place—Malyk Rowell; Doris Frazier; Jillian Hishaw
- F.A.R.M.S.—Jillian Hishaw



Photo: Negro sharecropper with twenty acres. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [LC-DIG-fsa-8b32339]; by Dorothea Lange, June 1938

F.A.R.M.S. — Muskogee, OK

On Bended Knees
by Jillian Hishaw

Like the death of the Lakota at Wounded Knee

we scream for the centuries

...the bleeding

in death, their spirits we envy

in lands full of freedom, in earth and breeze

soil fertilized with the blood of our ancestors that whisper in the trees.

paper annexing stolen dirt

white immigrants' wealth.

white immigrants

black hands

stolen lands

mixed up mules and crows and miles and acres of land yet to sow
it's happening now - did you know?

for the "freed" enslaved for their mothers, fathers
today there is more bleeding

all the wrongs are still too white
losing 30,000 acres
losing rights.

the losing non-whites

from the five uncivilized
my people were mixed, sold, never found
the five tribes built up by pounding the backs of my family down

my freedoms?
my people.
the land will tell you a story

NORTHEAST FARMERS OF COLOR

Northeast US



Our Vision is to Advance Land Sovereignty in the northeast region through reclamation of permanent and secure land tenure with and for Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian farmers and land stewards who will tend the land in a sacred manner that honors our ancestors' dreams for responsible farming, sustainable human habitat, reintegration of ceremony, restoration of native ecosystems, and global Indigenous cultural preservation.

Poets:

-WILDSEED Community Farm & Healing Village—Naima Penniman

-NEFOC—Hyperion Çaca Yvaire and Stephanie Morningstar

Photos and essay by Stephanie Morningstar

Interwoven Conversation: Hyperion Çaca Yvaire and JuPong Lin

PART II: THE ARTS FOODWAYS, COMMUNITIES, AND CONSERVED LANDS



Photo (opposite): Buffalo by James Calvin Schaap



Artwork by Diane Wilbon Parks

POETRY
X
HUNGER

Maryland

“Fighting Hunger One Poem at a Time”— Poet Willeena Booker

Essayist:

-Hiram Larew, Ph.D.

Poets:

-Willeena Booker

-John L. Dutton II

-Dianna L. Grayer, Ph.D.

-Antoni Ooti

Poetry X Hunger:**Lessons Learned from an Anti-Hunger Initiative**

by Hiram Larew, Ph.D.

Poetry about Hunger

A few years ago, a search for hunger-related poetry would have come up nearly empty-handed. Yes, many, many poems have been composed over the years about hunger of the heart, spirit and soul. But until recently, not many were available about hunger of the stomach.

This in spite of the fact that poetry has been useful in raising the public's attention about a variety of other social causes such as racial inequality, homelessness, poverty, environmental concerns, and the like. For example, Emma Lazarus's *The New Colossus* at the base of the Statue of Liberty, remains a clarion and motivational call about America's welcoming approach to immigrants and immigration.

I launched *Poetry X Hunger* in 2018 to make sure that poetry was included in the anti-hunger toolkit. I roused poets to write about hunger and the response has been remarkable. Nearly 300 poems and counting from a diversity of poets from around the world are now posted on the *Poetry X Hunger* website. Clearly, if asked to bring their talents to a worthy cause such as hunger or land care, poets will respond.

Poems posted on *Poetry X Hunger*, a few of which are showcased in this section, explore all aspects and facets of hunger, from its history to its causes, to its impacts and haunt. Malnutrition, food waste and, paradoxically, obesity (often linked to poor quality food) are covered as well. In other words, the "focus" of hunger poems is very broad.

longing for more
by Willeena Booker

barebones palette salivating on stale air
inhale aromatic memories before cupboards were left bare

praying for a meal but a morsel is barely there
silent duel with hunger's boastful stare

one country wallows in gluttony yet another laments in despair
if all men are created equal why is life so unfair

incessant gnawing deep in the pit of my pitiful soul
longing for sustenance to overflow an empty bowl

mocking me, looming large, whither I go
trembling hands unmask pain, my desperation grows

head tucked low veiling the shame
begging for food, oh God, this is insane!

the Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof
starvation is a poison, the antidote is love

full bellies pass by in quick paced steps
failing to see my hour of woe and regret

God bless the one who grows his own
tilling the ground with hands of his native home

villagers pledge to restore the land
plant more trees united we stand

hunger, a silent pandemic raging out of control
millions go hungry, but who keeps tally of the toll

swaddled skeletons and emaciated remains
hidden 6 feet deep, the world in motion yet unchanged

come stand with me, brothers and sisters, let us rise as one
act to eradicate hunger until global victory is won

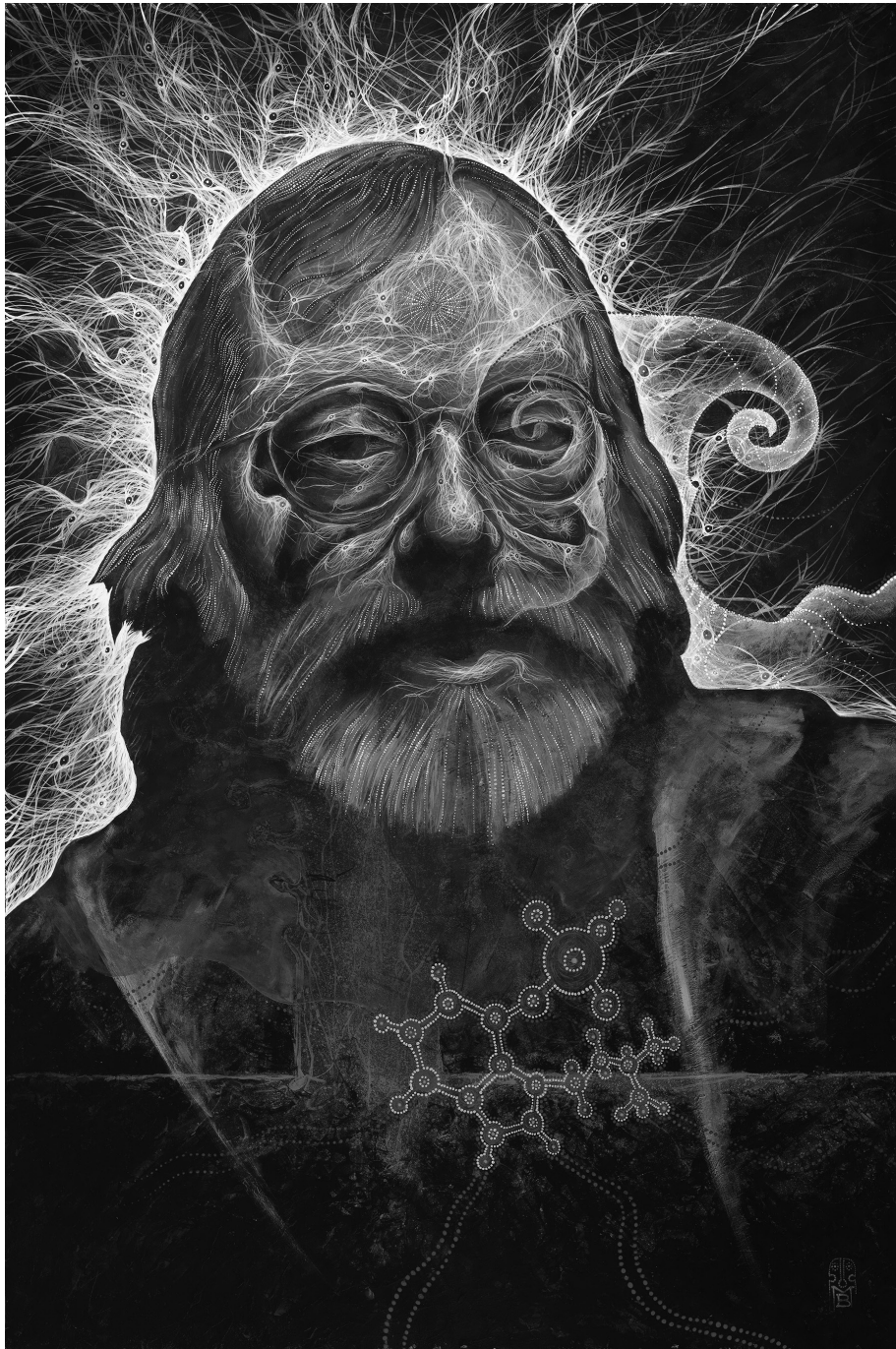
MARTIN BRIDGE

Massachusetts



Handprint by Martin Bridge
www.thebridgebrothers.com

-Essay and Art by Martin Bridge



Mycelial Messenger (Paul Stamets) by Martin Bridge

Handprint, a Journey by Martin Bridge

Being raised by a family of artists, teachers and nature lovers, I have been utterly entranced by the natural world since my childhood. As I grew and became more aware of the many factors that threaten the beauty of life on this planet, I became increasingly concerned about the trajectory of our ever expanding population and an economy that aims for exponential growth while drawing on finite resources.

I realize my worldview is miniscule when compared to the grand scheme, but I see enough on a local scale to feel compelled to take action. While investigating various aspects of the “sustainability” movement, I felt overwhelmed with the multitude of viewpoints one might look at and the numerous pathways one might start to traverse. In addition, I felt what many do, that I didn’t have the skills, time or resources to be a part of the solution.

I was never sure of what part I might play in this effort, and then a walk in the woods 15 years ago drastically changed the trajectory of my art, teaching and life as I was introduced to both the Permaculture Concept and the revolutionary work of Mycologist Paul Stamets.

As a friend and I were beginning our wandering through the forest he apologized to me saying that he had meant to bring me a gift of mushroom spawn. At the time I had no idea what that meant and he explained that it was woodchips inoculated with mushroom mycelium that you could mix into more wood chips to then create a mushroom bed that would yield gourmet and medicinal mushrooms. I immediately asked if I could cycle my carving waste into this to then eat a part of something that was part of my art, to have it become part of me in a way. As odd as this might sound I was transfixed by this idea and it was that hook that caught my attention enough to drive me to order “Mycelium Running” by Stamets. After reading his work I was hooked (or “Bemushroomed” as many Mycophiles refer to it as). Later in the walk I was introduced to my first Wildcrafted Mushroom. Turkey Tail, Coriolis or Trametes Versicolor is an incredibly common and yet incredibly potent medicinal mushroom that soon became the inspiration for one of my earlier mushroom paintings. Years later it became part of the collection of Paul Stamets himself.

SEEDS OF SOLIDARITY

Massachusetts



Seeds of Solidarity consists of a family farm and community based organization. The solar-powered farm uses agroecological methods to regenerate soil and restore climate while growing abundant and nourishing food.

The mission of the organization is to innovate programs that awaken the power among people of all ages—from toddlers to teens to people who are incarcerated— to Grow Food Everywhere to transform hunger to health, and create resilient lives and communities.

In 1998, a conversation among the Seeds of Solidarity founders and neighbors planted the seeds of an idea—to create a festival that would unite residents of their region whose livelihoods are connected to the land and the arts, celebrate a rural low-wealth region that is often overlooked, and bring much needed revitalization to their community.

The North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival, strongly rooted in grassroots values, remains a neighborhood created and scent-sational success.

-Essay and Photos by Dr. Deb Habib

Peace, Love, and Garlic: How a Neighborhood Ignited Local Culture and Economy

by Deb Habib, EdD

The sun had been up for several hours when my husband Ricky rolled out of bed on an autumn Sunday morning in 1999, the day after our first North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. Sleeping in was uncharacteristic for him as a farmer, along with the fact that he'd had a few beers the night before to celebrate the success of an event created on a wing and a prayer. Ricky had not in fact drank much of any alcohol in the previous decade and his hangover was compounded by little sleep or food in the forty-eight hours prior, which were instead filled with bagging and labeling garlic. The bed from which he rolled was in our tiny hand-built, off the grid cottage, complete with infant drool as his wake up alarm. We were nonetheless ecstatic, because almost a thousand people had found their way to a field in the woods ringed with a dozen hearty artists and farmers, a makeshift music stage, horse-drawn hayride, and one food truck stuck in the mud. They had readily bought the garlic grown with our soil and toil and put a few bucks in the festival donation jar. Their showing up marked the first grassroots event in our low-income, rural community that supported artists and farmers—financially and through the clear message that these livelihoods were valued and vital.

**SATURDAY & SUNDAY
OCT. 1-2, 2022
10 AM — 5 PM**

FORSTERS FARM
60 CHESTNUT HILL RD
ORANGE, MA

ADMISSION: ADULTS \$10
KIDS 12 & UNDER FREE!
STUDENTS, SENIORS, EBT: \$5

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MUSIC & PERFORMANCE GALORE • FUN ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES • PORTAL TO THE FUTURE

24 AND BACK FOR MORE!

We were new to the North Quabbin region, arriving on a quest for land just outside the unaffordable Connecticut River Valley. In Orange, an old mill town on the eastern edge of Franklin County, we walked overgrown stony fields and forest that did not at all resemble typical farmland and purchased it through a local land trust. We put our no-till methods, farming background, and dedication to work to build soil, start our vegetable and garlic farm, Seeds of Solidarity, and build a home and life for our family.

The festival idea was birthed on a late summer day during our first season on the land. Our neighbor Jim, a native of the region and phenomenal woodworker stopped in. Chatting while Ricky bagged up our gorgeous crop of our garlic, they sharing a similar lament. Where would we sell our beautiful garlic without traveling and taking a wholesale price-cut? Where could Jim show his stunning work that combined fine woodworking with items salvaged from local factories? All of the talented artists and hardworking farmers in our region had to leave town just to find a venue to sell their wares. This spontaneous conversation led to a creative and fateful potluck gathering of five- me and Ricky, Jim and his wife Alyssa and neighbor and potter Lydia Grey. It was 1998 and the 'buy local' craze was in its infancy. It had not yet hit our towns and likely never would in the way the nearby 5-college area would benefit from the buzz. There was beauty and ample skill to be found in our region and it deserved celebrating. After dinner and with ideas flowing, we each dug into our pockets to produce a twenty-dollar bill, creating a crumpled pile of 100 bucks on the center of the table. We met every month, always over shared food, to plan an event that would, according to our mission statement: "Unite North Quabbin people whose livelihoods are connected to the land and the arts, and to invite both local residents and those who do not live in the region to experience the richness of an area that is often overlooked."

We used the \$100 bucks to print up postcards to distribute in our local towns. The week before that first festival, a hurricane came through. Neighbors showed up with tractors and gravel to prepare for whatever crowds might show up to a muddy field in the middle of the woods. And they did, almost 1,000 strong.