



THE BERRY CENTER



WENDELL BERRY TEDDING HAY. PHOTO BY TANYA AMYX BERRY, CIRCA 1979

# *Earth Day Journal*

VOLUME ONE ~ APRIL 2018

*“...In this difficult time of failed public expectations, when thoughtful people wonder where to look for hope, I keep returning in my own mind to the thought of the renewal of the rural communities.”—WENDELL BERRY*



## *A Letter from the Executive Director of The Berry Center* MARY BERRY

DEAR FRIENDS,

**B**ecause you are reading this letter I know that you are viewing our first *Earth Day Journal* and I am grateful that you are taking the time to read about our work. Some of you may know about the work at The Berry Center, but many of you do not and so our *Journal* will share The Berry Center's important programs, which include the Archive at The Berry Center, Agrarian Culture Center and Bookstore, Home Place Meat, and the Wendell Berry Farming Program. Learn more about these programs on pages 4-5. Also included is an article by my father, Wendell Berry, an interview with our visionary co-founder and sustaining funder Christina Lee Brown, and other things we think you will find interesting and inspiring.

My father's piece makes the argument for The Berry Center's advocacy for small farmers and land conserving communities and the way we have chosen to educate young farmers and to stabilize and increase farm income for existing farmers. At the same time, our programs are strengthening the culture of the rural place where my family has lived and farmed for eight generations. We feel strongly that we must work on the art and the science of farming if we are to come up under the disintegrating, ruinous industrial agriculture that is called "farming" in America now with something truly sustainable. This is hopeful work and I ask that you consider supporting it and [become a member of The Berry Center](#).

I have lived and farmed in Henry County, Kentucky, all of my life. Good farming comes from a passion that must be supported by a culture that values it. In the years since I bought a farm in 1981 the number of farms and farmers has greatly decreased. In fact, in the U.S., less than 1 percent of the population farms for a living today. Of those who do farm only 16 percent of small family farms earn the majority of their household income from farming; secondary incomes are now a necessity. Our nation must become a culture of people who understand that this won't do. We will not become a country of communities of people who treat each other and the land well as long as we are willing to accept an economy that allows people and land to be sacrificed for quick profit.

Which brings me to this. I don't remember a time that I wasn't aware of a "local food movement." My husband Steve Smith and I started farming, on different farms, as highly diversified farmers raising tobacco, beef cattle, forage crops, some grain for feeding our own stock, vegetables for wholesale markets, and in my case, running a small dairy. As the years went by and it became clear that we weren't making any headway on debt or improving our farms, we both became organic, entrepreneurial farmers. Steve started the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in Kentucky and I raised pastured poultry, organic vegetables, and so on. He and I speak often of our attempts to keep farming after the tobacco culture disappeared from this region.





COURTESY STERLING COLLEGE

We believed that our entrepreneurial work would let us keep making farm payments while we trusted, naively it turned out, that there would be a local food movement that farmers would soon join. What did happen is that the corporations moved faster than farmers could and took over production of organic food. Our mistake was to think that local farmers were necessary to this effort. But the industry didn't need us, they could take care of food production much more cheaply and efficiently by cutting corners on the care of the land, waterways, animals, and communities.

In 2010 I went to my father with my concerns and he said, "It sounds like you are starting a center. Do it." This *Journal* tells the story of what I have done with the help of family, friends, exceptional co-workers, and The Berry Center board. My father calls this the membership. People who know they need each other and want to be involved in the work of land conserving communities. Nothing we are doing here cannot be replicated in other places and nothing but this

kind of local work will change our polarized, destructive culture.

The Berry Center was started because my father and I are hopeful people and that hope has grown as time has gone by. Telling the truth about what is happening in farm country is not always well received. People, understandably, want to believe that agriculture is improving because the words "sustainable," "local," "green," etc., are everywhere. The fact that there are so many farmers' markets, community gardens and school gardens, and farm to table restaurants is good but these things have not fundamentally changed land use in Kentucky or the rest of America. But, telling the truth and working on things that will make a change IS hopeful, interesting, and effective. That's what we are doing at The Berry Center—preserving the legacy of remarkable agrarian leaders of many generations in my family, and putting my father's words into action by creating local models that support healthy, thriving, and land conserving agrarian communities that can be replicated everywhere. [Please join us in our efforts. Click here.](#)

## *The Berry Center Programs*



### ARCHIVE AT THE BERRY CENTER

**T**he Archive at The Berry Center collects and preserves distinct books, articles, works of art, photographs, recorded interviews and manuscripts that offer compelling insights into good farming and land use and the rich culture of rural communities over the last century. The collection is based on the work and writings of three remarkable agrarian leaders—John M. Berry, Sr., John M. Berry Jr., and Wendell Berry. We are dedicated to preserving their legacy and wisdom, along with that of their influential partners and colleagues. But more than just preserving history, our remarkable collection chronicles legacies that remind us that we need to learn from the past to shape the future.

Our Center houses the Tanya Berry Agrarian Library, a lending library serving as a resource for local farmers. We also host Legacy Exhibits of photographs and artwork that complement our Archive.

### AGRARIAN CULTURE CENTER AND BOOKSTORE

**N**ext door to The Berry Center, housed in a log cabin built in 1790, the Agrarian Culture Center and Bookstore welcomes visitors from near and far. The Bookstore carries all of Wendell Berry's publications, including many signed out-of-print, first edition, and hard-to-find titles. The rest of our collection is inspired by Wendell Berry's home library and features works that have influenced his life, titles by friends and mentors, and books for young people that have been beloved by the Berry family for generations.

The Agrarian Culture Center and Bookstore is the birthplace of a rural reading program, the Agrarian Literary League (ALL). Established in 2016, ALL is bringing humanities programming to rural communities, fostering the preservation of local histories through dialogue and storytelling, strengthening pride and stewardship of place, and conserving the unique culture found in rural places. Books for this program are chosen based on their enduring cultural value and potential to stimulate reflection and conversation. As our program expands, reading lists and accompanying materials will be made available to wider audiences.

The Agrarian Culture Center also hosts a number of events, including the annual Kentucky Arts and Letters Day, with readings by distinguished Kentucky authors, and the ALL Fall Festival, which celebrates agrarian literature and culture.





## HOME PLACE MEAT™

The Berry Center's Home Place Meat is establishing a cooperative for local livestock farmers to sell to local markets. We believe farmers must be at the core of change. We are beginning at home in north-central Kentucky to build a local food model that can be scaled outward and replicated in communities throughout the nation. A collaborative project, we are addressing fundamental challenges of creating local food economies. Producing local food, establishing fair compensation for farmers, managing supply and demand, accessing markets, and responding to consumer values are only a few of the issues we're taking on.

Home Place is a radical challenge to today's unhealthy, industrial system of meat production. In contrast to industrial agriculture, Home Place is based on ecology and care—respectful animal husbandry, healthy landscapes, quality food, and thriving farm communities. Home Place Meat is also responding to the plain truth that, despite the trends toward organic, healthier foods, the industrial agriculture paradigm still dominates and has not fundamentally changed the economy and culture of farming.

A local food economy that is better for farmers, better for livestock, and better for the planet—that's Home Place Meat.

## THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM

The Wendell Berry Farming Program provides future farmers with an education in agrarian thought and practice that is holistic and place-based. Our curriculum applies Wendell Berry's writing to learning and is designed to serve students from generational farm families, rural communities, and urban agrarians across the nation.

In partnership with Vermont's Sterling College, we will begin to offer courses in Henry County, Kentucky, in fall 2018. The Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College will offer upper-division undergraduate work as well as educational training courses for members of our community. Under collaborative course development between The Berry Center and Sterling College, students will work with renowned agrarian leaders as well as businesses, farm and food organizations, and local farmers. In contrast to the dominant industrial approach to agricultural education, The Wendell Berry Farming Program is drawing connections between education, communities, culture, and the land.



COURTESY STERLING COLLEGE

## *The Reassurer*—WENDELL BERRY

A people in the throes of national prosperity, who  
breathe poisoned air, drink poisoned water, eat  
poisoned food,  
who take poisoned medicines to heal them of the poisons  
that they breathe, drink, and eat,  
such a people crave the further poison of official  
reassurance. It is not logical,  
but it is understandable, perhaps, that they adore  
their President who tells them that all is well,  
all is better than ever.

The President reassures the farmer and his wife who  
have exhausted their farm to pay for it, and have  
exhausted themselves to pay for it,  
and have not paid for it, and have gone bankrupt for  
the sake of the free market, foreign trade, and the  
prosperity of corporations;  
he consoles the Navahos, who have been exiled from their  
place of exile, because the poor land contained  
something required for the national prosperity,  
after all;  
he consoles the young woman dying of cancer caused by a  
substance used in the normal course of national  
prosperity to make red apples redder;  
he consoles the couple in the Kentucky coalfields, who  
sit watching TV in their mobile home on the mud of  
the floor of a mined-out stripmine;  
from his smile they understand that the fortunate have  
a right to their fortunes, that the unfortunate have  
a right to their misfortunes, and that these are  
equal rights.



The President smiles with the disarming smile of a man  
who has seen God, and found Him a true American,  
not overbearingly smart.

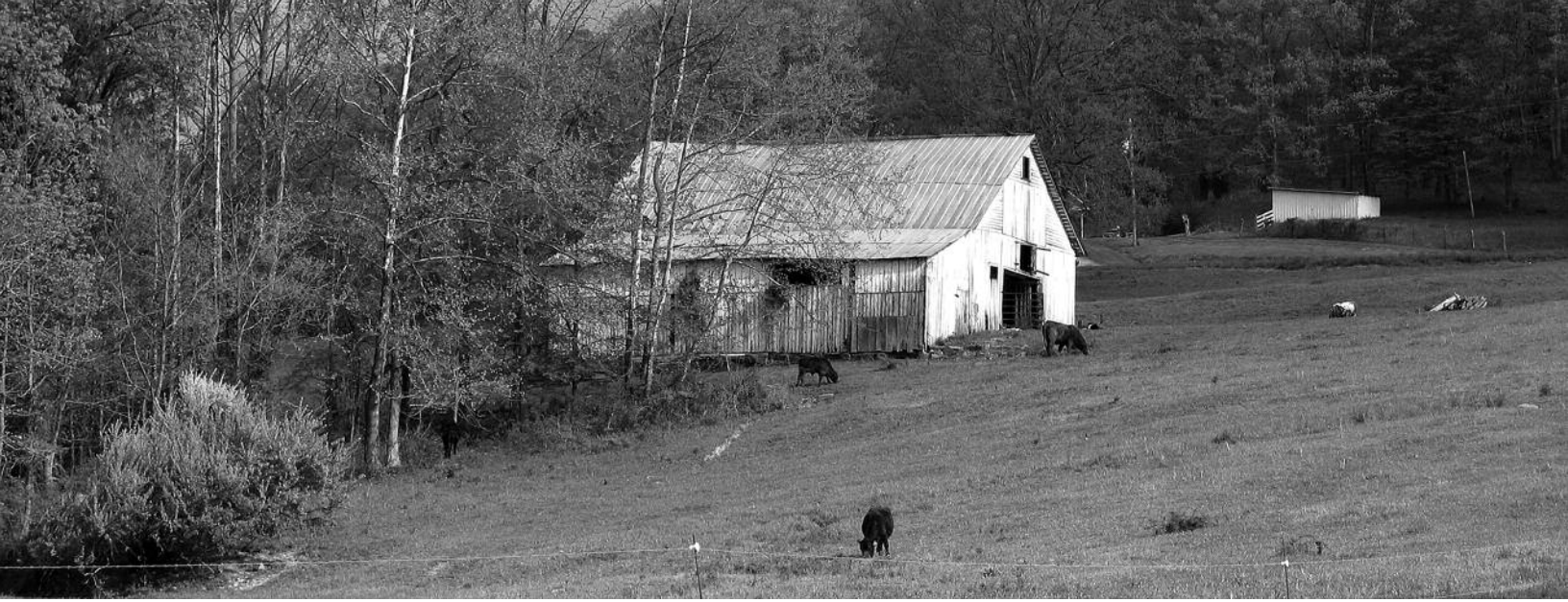
The President reassures the Chairman of the Board of the  
Humane Health for Profit Corporation of America,  
who knows in his replaceable heart that health, if  
it came, would bring financial ruin;

he reassures the Chairman of the Board of the Victory  
and Honor for Profit Corporation of America, who  
has been wakened in the night by a dream of the  
calamity of peace.

*Entries, 1994, 1997 Counterpoint Press*







## *For the Neighbors*—WENDELL BERRY

**I**n our present understanding of “environmental” threats and emergencies there is just about customarily a displacement of attention from causes to effects. Climate change, for instance, is represented as a threat that is fairly new. It is caused, however, by our fairly old and well-established habits of waste and pollution, which are caused in turn by the assumption, now about 500 years old, that if we use up or destroy a resource in one place, or if we merely want something we don’t have, we can make up the loss or supply our wish by importation from another place. This is colonialism, much older than 500 years, but enlarged and intensified by cheap long-distance transportation from about the time of Columbus.

In the United States, which once were colonies, we made what we now call “rural America” a colony of the cities and the corporations. If the cities and corporations have wanted coal or copper or cotton or corn, the rule has been that they should go into the country and take its products for the lowest possible price but at an unbooked and immeasurable cost to the land and the people.

And so we have had several centuries of plunder and waste and pollution, “backed” by concentrated wealth and power on a continental or global scale, but always enacted in the rural landscapes,

country communities, and small towns, which have always been readily dismissable as “country” or “corny” or “the boondocks” or “the middle of nowhere.”

If all this adds up to global emergencies such as climate change, it also produces in universities, bureaus, think tanks, and the like, a hearty appetite for global solutions involving dramatic technologies, heroic breakthroughs, and epic sums of money. The necessary repairs, even so, will have to be made in the rural landscapes, country communities, and small towns where the trouble started.

The great questions now overhanging these small rural places where the global problem will be solved are these: What will be the solutions? And How and on what scale and by whom and for whose ultimate benefit will they be installed?

The generally espoused solution to the problem of polluting energy is “clean energy,” of which the most likely and most promoted sources at present are solar collectors and windmills. My own preference by far is for the solar collectors because once they are manufactured they involve no mechanical working parts, make no noise, and cost less to maintain. In earnest of this preference, Tanya Berry and I have had for several years three



large solar panels on the hillside above our house. We acknowledge that they are immitigably intrusive and ugly, but so far they have made no disturbance and caused no trouble. They are compatible with the grass growing and the sheep grazing underneath them. They are, as advertised, “passive” and so require of us no knowledge or skill or effort—which may, in the long run, increase the already “normal” passivity of our people. Even so, I am strongly in favor of local energy put to local use. I like our solar panels because we own them.

As a person long opposed to the destructiveness of the coal and pollution companies, I am of course in favor of the responsible use of clean energy. But I don’t want to see the technologies of clean energy imposed upon the land and the people of rural America with the same aggression and indifference by which other industrial technologies have been imposed. Though I look at our three solar panels with a mixture of approval and tolerance, I look with horror and foreboding at the pictures of large fields covered with rows of solar panels, and of our hilltops savagely bulldozed for the emplacement of windmills. And I too vividly envision the combination of conservationists, corporations, university departments, and government agencies that might impose and enforce another colonial economy, this time of clean energy, as the next “solution to the problem of rural poverty.”

This turns me again toward my wits-end belief that the only local protection against an enveloping and destructive national or global economy is a local economy as diverse and complete as the local land and people can make it. I believe that the thought of economic self-sufficiency has mainly been imposed by shortages during wars, as it was upon the United States during World War II—when, for a rarity, the government was officially grateful to farmers. War seems to remind a nation’s leaders that it might be starved or frozen

into submission. But now, because we have been so nearly ruined by the “free market,” “economic growth,” “trade-offs,” and “creative destruction,” I wonder if a reasonably self-sufficient local economy—in, for example, a rural county such as mine—might not be intended and contrived as a defense against economic aggression.

We have the rule for this in the ancient proposal that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. The most obvious implication of that rule (if we aren’t carried away by some sort of “spirituality”) is that neighbors should work together in mutual support of their economic life. And beyond neighborly work we have the means, already in use and proven, of local currency and local marketing of local products.

The immediate, particular, and practical demands of a local economy lead us past, even as they add immeasurably to, the also necessary means of political protest and organization. And so I affirm entirely the thought—already living and lively in my own rural county—that the first political necessity, and the necessary test of political sincerity, is to solve the local problems that most need solving, and that you are most capable of solving, however small or humble those problems may seem to be.

This is the operating principle of The Berry Center in New Castle, Kentucky. This organization, established by my daughter Mary and her allies, honors and continues the work of my father and my brother, in politics and the Burley Tobacco Cooperative Association, for the eco-

economic survival of small farmers. Not long ago I did not expect to see such an effort started here. Now, grateful and rejoicing, I am living into its difficult reality.



PHOTO BY GUY MENDES

## *An Interview with The Berry Center Founding Board Member* CHRISTY BROWN



*I recently visited Christina (Christy) Lee Brown at Poplar Terrace, her “forever and ever” home located in the rolling hills just outside of Louisville, Kentucky. Christy, together with her late husband Owsley Brown II, has been a pillar of philanthropy in Kentucky and beyond for many years. She is a founding board member of The Berry Center providing inspiration, guidance, and initial funding that launched the Center.*

*We sat down in the very drawing room where she and her husband first met Wendell Berry in the early 1980s and talked about influences in her life, her many years of community service, and reflections on the work of The Berry Center.—Debbie Barker*

**DB:** What has inspired your interest in issues you’ve supported for so many years and informed your sense of philanthropy?

**CB:** Three great influences come to mind immediately. First, I had a horse that really was my best friend until I went to college. I used to ride a lot; I rode throughout the countryside in Maryland where I grew up and the older I get, the more I realize how that shaped who I am today. In those hours on my wonderful horse, whose name was Grey Ghost, I was absorbing the magnificence of nature.

My grandfather (on my mother’s side) was another key influence. He was a country doctor and also very involved in his community, including politics. He knew the importance of addressing all aspects of health besides only human health. He also farmed very seriously and our family’s food source came primarily from my grandparents’ farm.

Another great influence was going to a convent school—Visitation Academy of Frederick, in Maryland. It was a cloistered order. The nuns gave up everything for the purpose of teaching us, praying for us. That was an extraordinary gift. Such examples become part of the tapestry of life that created you.

**DB:** So all of these experiences imparted a strong sense of stewardship and serving.

**CB:** Yes, I was raised that we are here to serve. My daddy was also a strong example—he served as mayor of our very small town.

**DB:** And then you met your husband, Owsley Brown II, and both of you have been pivotal in

supporting the community here in Kentucky and beyond for many years.

**CB:** Service was a primary thing that Owsley and I had in common; a sort of philosophical connection. We both believed that people are born to serve.

**DB:** What did you and Owsley learn from one another in your service?

**CB:** Our stewardship grew. The largest part of our love and our marriage and the evolution of our friendship was the fact that we had that desire to serve, it was natural. We would discuss and share things about our various projects. We had fun; and dinner conversation was always fascinating. We learned from each other and enriched each other. It was a wonderful journey for 43 years.

**DB:** When did you meet Wendell?

Around the ‘80s I believe. I met him through Lois Mateus, who worked for Brown-Forman (the family business). Wendell came to Poplar Terrace a number of times to see Owsley and me to solicit for different projects that he cared about. Of course we were very impressed; he is such a sincere, authentic man.

**DB:** And how did you meet Mary Berry?

**CB:** Lois and I went to the winery that Mary started; we had a lovely lunch with Mary and I bought one of those divine chickens (Mary raised pastured poultry).

**DB:** Then she got the notion to start an organization to preserve the legacy of her farming family who were leaders in their community for several



generations. You and Owsley were the first ones to offer financial support for this initiative.

*CB:* I was impressed with how heart felt she was about perpetuating her family legacy. It still inspires me. Rather than coming at it from only high-lighting Wendell's work; it had much deeper roots.

*DB:* Fast forward to today; The Berry Center (TBC) has four major programs. What do you find unique about TBC's work?

*CB:* For me the work reflects the term "home place." TBC is preserving the legacy of not only Wendell's wise writings but of the Berry family service to their community and restoring rural wellbeing.

*DB:* Yes, a Wendell quote we often use is: "If you don't know where you're from, you'll have a hard time saying where you're going."

*CB:* TBC provides critical documentation of successful farm programs such as the Producer's Program. We are also becoming an important center for historians, researchers, teachers, students, and others seeking agrarian information and history that is difficult to find.

*DB:* We see an increasing divide between rural and urban America, which Wendell has been writing about for years, and TBC work addresses these issues head on.

*CB:* Yes, Wendell is the seer, the voice in the wilderness. If we don't embrace our home place, and all forms of health—soil, water, air, and more, including spiritual—in a community, we're in trouble. TBC is doing this work. How perfect and how beautiful is that? For example, the Agrarian Literary League (ALL) is all about intellectual health by restoring humanities education to our rural communities.

*DB:* And we have Home Place Meat, which is bringing local beef farmers together with local markets.

*CB:* This is a wonderful model. We are working with farmers who wish to participate in healthier

farming while also having financial stability.

*DB:* I find TBC work unique because it takes a holistic view.

*CB:* Yes, farming has to be financial, spiritual, psychological, etc.,—all forms of health must thrive.

*DB:* And it's so important to build place-based, home place models.

*CB:* This gets back to the urban-rural divide. We have to learn to understand the interdependence and interconnectedness (which Wendell writes about all the time). It's up to each of us to take responsibility. How do we empower communities to become intimately engaged versus having people from the outside saying what needs to be done? We have to build models that are led by the community.

*DB:* Another exciting program that is being developed at TBC is the Wendell Berry Farming Program.

*CB:* It's exciting and it's a huge responsibility, partnering with a college (TBC is partnering with Sterling College). It has great potential on all sides of the spectrum so we are working carefully to roll this out. The curriculum applies Wendell's principles and values that are based on understanding the relationship of nature and human and economic health. This curriculum can revitalize future farmers and communities and be a model for the world.

*DB:* The work has to start in local communities to show it can happen.

*CB:* Hard work starts with each one of us, our families, our workplace. We have to understand the interrelationship. Urban people have to understand that they are dependent on rural areas for all sorts of things—yes, food, but also natural resources. At the heart of TBC and Wendell Berry and a handful of other thoughtful prophets is that we will have healthy humans and a healthy world when we have healthy air, water, and soil.

*For complete interview, see [www.berrycenter.org](http://www.berrycenter.org)*

THE BERRY CENTER  
111 S. Main Street  
P.O. Box 582  
New Castle, KY 40050

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THE BERRY CENTER  
111 S. Main Street  
P.O. Box 582, New Castle, KY 40050  
Ph: 502-845-9200

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129 S. Main Street  
P.O. Box 582, New Castle, KY 40050  
Ph: 502-743-1820