

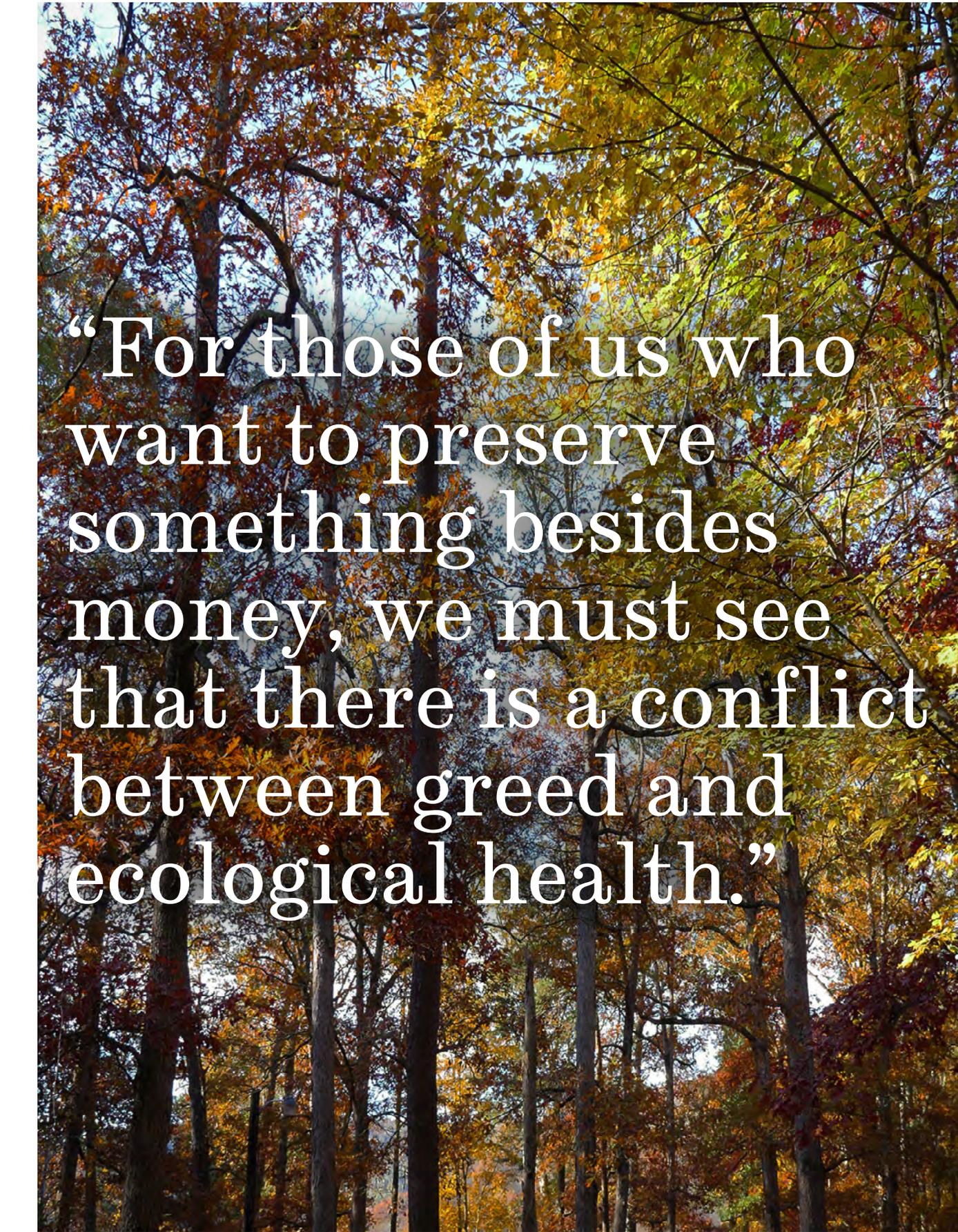


THE BERRY CENTER NEWSLETTER



Ewe lambs on The Berry Center farm. Photo by Dr. Ed Fredrickson

Fall | Winter 2020



“For those of us who want to preserve something besides money, we must see that there is a conflict between greed and ecological health.”

Mixed native hardwood forest near Berea, KY.

GREETINGS FROM THE BERRY CENTER

Dear Friends,

I've never much liked New Year's Eve. Even when I was young the thought that I might be forced to stay up until midnight didn't hold much appeal. Steve and I are hard-pressed to stay up until 9 these days. But this year I intend to stay up and see this year out. The loss of life, of health, of work we've suffered is unspeakable. I often turn to my father's fiction in times of trouble and am comforted by it. This quote from Jayber Crow is especially helpful to me now:

“And so how was a human to pray? I didn't know, and yet I prayed. I prayed the terrible prayer: “Thy will be done.” Having so prayed, I prayed for strength. That seemed reasonable and right enough. As did praying for forgiveness and the grace to forgive. I prayed unreasonably, foolishly, hopelessly, that everybody in Port William might be blessed and happy — the ones I loved and the ones I did not. I prayed my gratitude.”

Our hope now lies in greater understanding of the dangers of our current economy. But the indifference from high places toward the vulnerable and the willingness to politicize an illness and to flat out say, as some have, that keeping the economy going is worth human lives shouldn't come as a surprise to me but it has. It is the same indifference that has separated people from land and land from people for generations. It seems to me that the pandemic has furthered the understanding that the global free market is dangerous to the natural world, to industrial workers, to farmers, to the land itself and so to us all. For those of us who want to preserve something besides money, we must see that there is a conflict between greed and ecological health. There is danger and cost in the proliferation of pests, weeds, and diseases that accompany international trade, and that increase with the volume of trade.

This seems to me where hope meets COVID-19.

We still have some farmers who can produce good food. We have a growing number of people who want to eat good food and support good farming at the same time. Maybe our current global emergency has shown us that we should not be destroying the land and the people of rural places for cheap resources but rather working toward viable local economies. Of course, everything that is needed locally can't be produced locally. (I say that as a person who is worried about a second cup of coffee before I finish my first.) My father says that the idea of a local economy rests upon only two principles: neighborhood and subsistence. This means that we all take an inventory of what we have to work with and what we can produce ourselves.

We have a long way to go but many of us have gotten started. Wes Jackson says that we are just trying to come up under what is coming apart with something stable. We need to become people who see from a local point of view. What is here, what is in my community, what is in me that can lead to something better?

To build a land-based economy that is just and sound and protects local producers for the benefit of local consumers will take time. There will be charity in this, which is why The Berry Center does its work with the help of its membership. But there is charity in fair prices, which is why parity pricing is such an important part of our work with farmers. Farmers will not be able to afford to farm well until we become a culture that will support them.

Please take the time to read the reports from the program directors in this newsletter. I am thankful for each of them and for all of my co-workers at The Berry Center. And, for each one of you who has taken the time to pay attention to our work. My family and I are most grateful.

Best wishes this holiday season,



Executive Director

The Berry Center

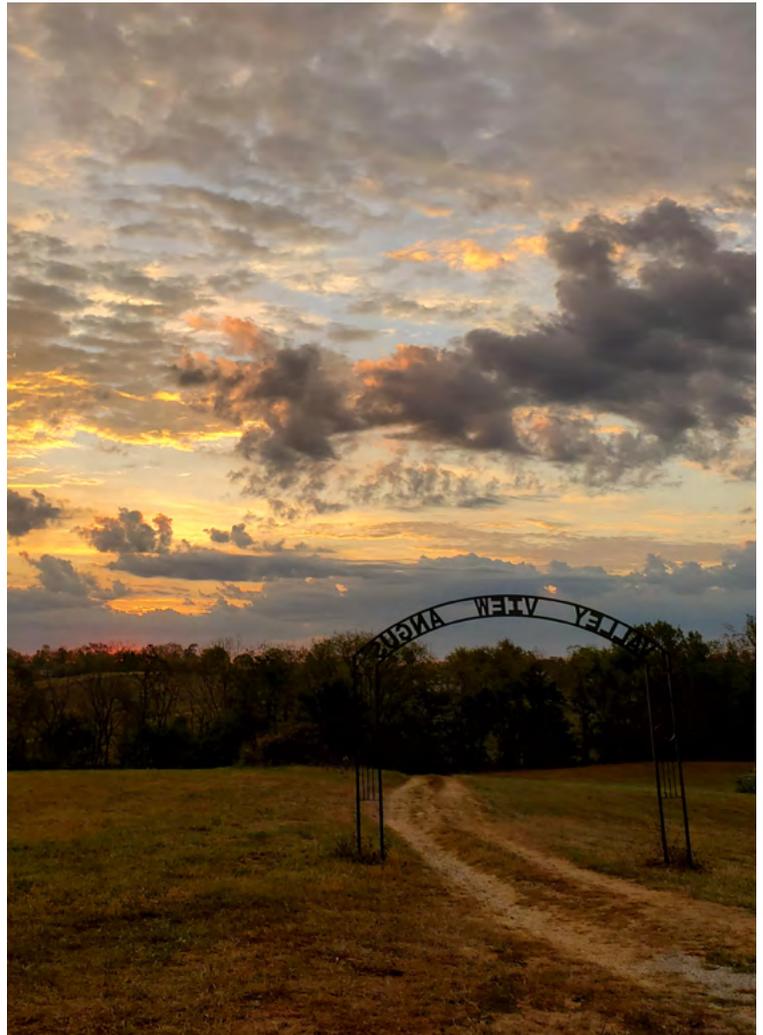
LESSONS IN HOMECOMING

Wendell Berry Farming Program Of Sterling College

The Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College prides itself on a curriculum which is focused on the practical: livestock husbandry, restorative forestry, farm and business planning, agricultural ecology, and the like. But there is a practical consideration, too, in knowing and loving the land you are on, all its history, and your forebears. With a fuller perspective on how yesterday's farmland has been used and misused one can more fully address the problems of today. Here is an excerpt from 'Thoughts on Agrarian Tradition and Practice in Place: The History and Relationships Between Landscape, Culture, and Food of a Henry County Farm', an essay by Lizzie Camfield, Farming Program student and Henry County resident. If you, like Lizzie, are interested in putting culture back into agriculture and community back into education, you may be a good fit for the next cohort in this accredited, full time, tuition-free farming education. Prospective WBFP applicants may contact the Sterling College Office of Admission by email at admission@sterlingcollege.edu or by phone at (800) 648-3591/(802) 586-7711 ext. 100

Down a curvy, one lane road in Campbellsburg, Kentucky, sitting atop a steep ridge lies Pickle Creek Farm. It's a humble homestead with sustainable goals; named after my partner's late brother Ryan's mechanic shop—and also his dog, Pickle, whom we now care for and love dearly. The name came about by a habit of both brother and dog somehow "always getting into a pickle." This land is family land of my partner, Chris, the descendant of many generations of Gorbands in this area. The farm is around 55 acres of karst land, half forested, straddling Henry and Trimble Counties. The ridge forms an L shape covered in pasture, with wooded flanks and slopes that lead to a creek cutting a valley through the back of the farm.

The sun blankets the hills a million different ways over the year, and the moon and stars are unrivaled in their sheer luminosity. In the summer, the full trees muffle the sound of the nearby interstate, and in the winter, we have an unparalleled view of the rolling valleys and hills that surround us. The great blue heron often greets us from the creek that runs through the culvert as you come up the steep driveway; a stoic hawk often standing watch from the power lines at the entrance to our gate. The creek that winds through the back valley of the farm is deep in the forest canopy. It's cool in the summer, lush with wild ramps in the spring, and



Sunset on Pickle Creek Farm, photo by the author.

flanked with wingstem, milkweed, and ironweed all summer-long. The creek bed is littered with limestone fossils from millions of years ago, embedded with countless crinoids and brachiopods. The pastures are alive with butterflies of all colors, fluttering from bloom to bloom. This place has our hearts, and every day I am captivated and impassioned by its beauty.

Often while looking out on that ocean swell of hills and valleys from our ridge top view, I wonder who else came before us, in this place. Who else has marveled at this beautiful scene? Did they have the same love for this place? I think about how it will look for my children, and my children's children. I think about what my part—tucked between ancestors and descendants—might be in the immensely large and complicated history of this landscape, and what an agrarian lifestyle might afford the

land, the animals, and the community of this place. The history of this land and the people who have inhabited it is vast and heavy. My three years here with my partner is a mere blink in time. There are so many layers of trauma that blanket this landscape, and they require and deserve careful unpacking. How does a person of European descent address the deeply rooted history of violence against this land and the people who inhabited it over the ages—and against those who were brought here by force? How do we best address this truth with respect and humility? Agriculture and food are deeply embedded into our culture and the cultures of the past, especially in this rural place. The cultural history of the area immediately surrounding Pickle Creek Farm is of particular interest: What did this place look like before contact—before European colonization? Who occupied this area? What was grown on this land, and how was it grown? How was the land managed? What did the people who lived here eat, and how was it prepared?

In the nearer past, around 20 to 30 years ago, corn, tobacco, and hay were grown here—sometimes simultaneously, but more often in rotation—by

Chris' grandfather, William Gorbandt. Today, we raise a modestly large (every year, larger) garden, have a small flock of chickens, and hay the pastures. In the future, we hope to be a draft-powered farm, with a market garden and a community-driven, educational mission. Sheep, goats, cattle, and pastured poultry also fit into our long-term regenerative plan, with rotational, multi-species grazing.

Our work must focus on the people who occupied this area, by nativity, choice, or by force. It is my hope that our time here will illuminate these important considerations and ways of thinking about, caring for, working with, and connecting to this landscape. I hope my studies shed light on our place in this long lineage of land stewards, and the best way to honor and care for this land. The Native people of Kentucky lived gently on this land for millennia, long before Europeans desecrated it, and long before a white couple moved up on this hill in the 21st century. Our lives' work will also address two important questions: What does it mean to be indigenous, and can we become native to a place through agrarian thought and practice?

I will answer these, to the best of my ability and knowledge, with my time here. I think the crux of the answer lies in how best to care for this place, and my role in the long and often dark history of this land. I hope to use this historical guide in my stewardship of Pickle Creek Farm. I hope that by giving voice and truth to the past of this place, I can learn how to best care for it. As Wendell says:

“It is impossible to escape the sense that I am involved in history. What I am has been to a considerable extent determined by what my forbears were, by how they chose to treat this place while they lived in it; the lives of most of them diminished by it, and limited its possibilities, and narrowed its future. And every day I am confronted by the question of what inheritance I will leave” (Berry – A Native Hill)

I think by choosing to stay, and choosing to care for the land with agrarian principles, I am becoming part of this place, and it, a part of me. I am choiceless in that truth. I cannot escape this place, not that I would want to. My ancestors may have desecrated it, stolen it from the Native people, and sucked it dry. But I have a choice in how I will care for this land. I have a choice to do the right things. I won't narrow its possibilities, but work to restore its future. It all turns on affection, as Berry has also said. The soil knows my name, and every day I hope to know it better. -LC



WBFP student Lizzie Camfield with hog. Photo by Rachel Breeden.

History In The Margins

Michele Guthrie, Archivist

I recently received an interesting newsletter from the Library of Congress. An artist and educator, Courtney McClellan received its “2021 Innovator in Residence” appointment. Her special focus and interest is the “strike-throughs, underlines, doodles, and marginalia” made by historical figures in their personal papers at the Library of Congress. “These markings give researchers a more intimate sense of the writer and shed light on the story of how a work was made or received. Researchers can understand more about the creative process, opinions, and musings of people throughout the centuries by understanding these historical markings that are often, literally and figuratively, in the margins.”

The materials in our archives from the Berry Family are the foundation of our work as well as a remarkable resource for researchers. The late John Berry, Sr. and John Berry, Jr., and Wendell Berry authored articles, speeches, correspondence, reports, and interviews that we have found invaluable. In addition, one can find interesting notes, corrections, additions, and comments in margins; a careful reading of them indeed provides additional insights into the convictions and ways of thinking of these three remarkable agrarians.

John Berry, Jr. was well known for writing down his thoughts on whatever paper was at hand, frequently in the middle of the night. In one instance he wrote the beginning of an essay around the margins of a brochure. He always kept practical solutions for farmers and rural communities on his mind.

John Berry, Sr. attended law school at George Washington University in Washington, D. C. at night and during the day worked for Rep. Virgil Chapman, (Congressman from Kentucky’s 6th District) from 1923 – 1927. Upon graduating from law school, he decided to come home to establish a law practice in New Castle, farm, and to join in establishing the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association and, ultimately authoring a program, the Tobacco Program, which would protect farmers in the marketplace.

In handwritten essays and copies of articles we

have, he frequently wrote margin notes that show that he believed the Tobacco Program, a New Deal program that helped so many thousands of family farmers, reflected not only neighborliness and other values of faith traditions, but fulfilled the intent of the Constitution, “to promote the general welfare.”

In his essay, “Impressions of 25 years of Washington”, Berry writes:

“As agricultural dreams have been expanded and realized so have the functions of government expanded and fastened themselves upon us. Until it is colossal. It is stupendous. It is the biggest business in the country and doubtless in the world. It touches extensively every man’s life, with the result that weekly if not daily, the average citizen now is obligated to go to the county seat to deal with some agency of the federal government whereas 25 years ago he made only the occasional trip to pay his taxes or buy his dog tags. The rest of the time he stayed at home, pursued his business and enjoyed the stimulating adventures of an unregulated private enterprise.”

He was not a proponent of government intrusion into our lives, yet, he believed in the necessity and the efficacy of the Tobacco Program (the Program), a New Deal era government farm program. In the margins of this particular essay the note is: “We boast that the farm program has cost its government nothing but has made a profit.”

Thomas Petrie, a Wisconsin congressman who worked to end the Tobacco Program wrote an article which has Mr. Berry, Sr.’s comments in its margins: “This fellow Petri is rabid but his errors about the program are glaring. Insofar as burley is concerned he does not know what he is talking about.” The numerous comments on the copy of the article point out and correct Petrie’s factual errors and offer additional information and opinions which demonstrate Mr. Berry’s depth of knowledge and intensity of feeling about the Program.

Archives tell stories of the people whose work is preserved to inform and educate researchers,

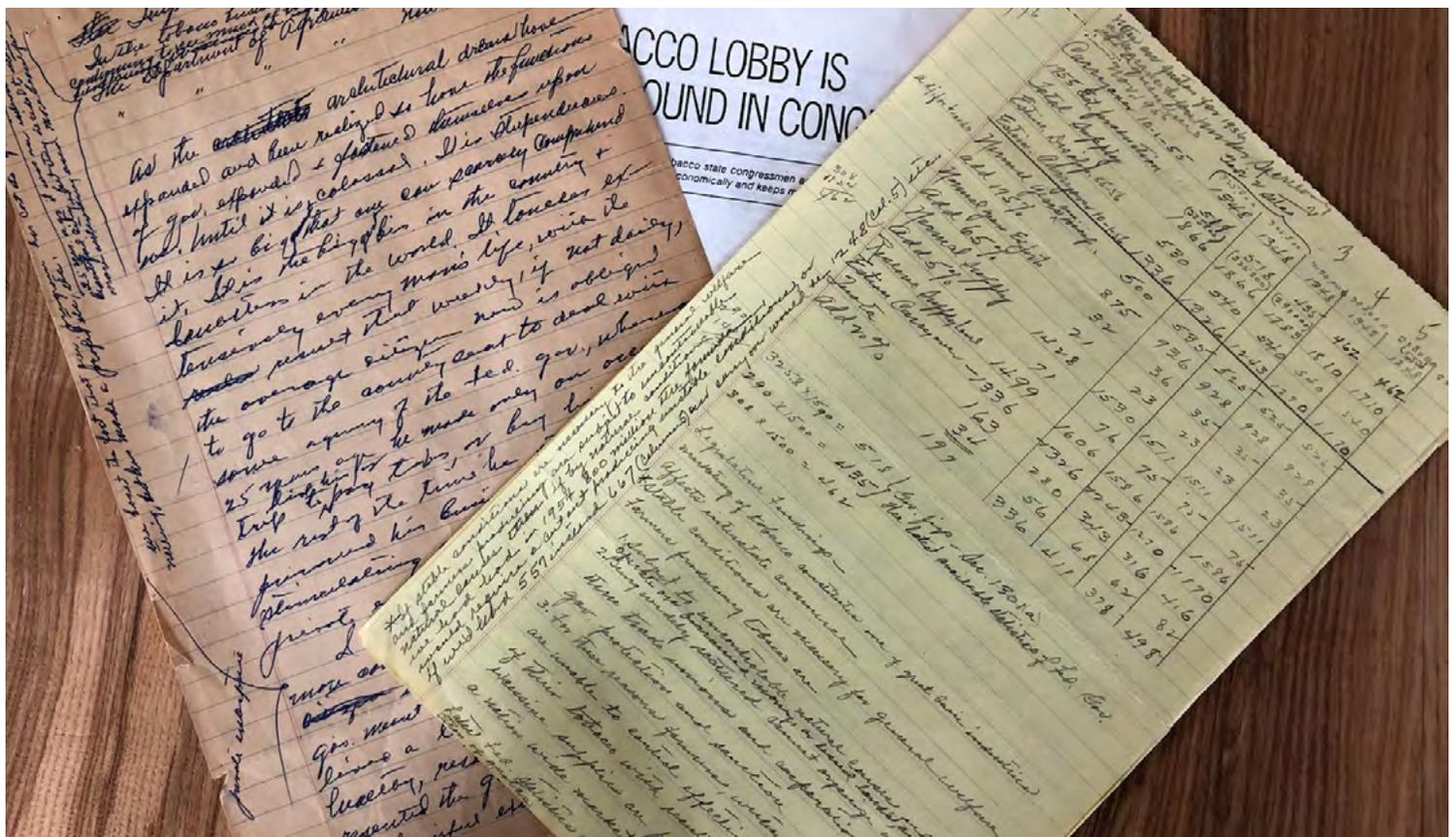
students, donors and the general public. An examination of the materials in the Archives at the Berry Center can lead to a greater understanding of three great agrarians, their work, thinking, and the practical solutions that resulted from it. During the years of the Program, 1941 – 2004, Kentucky farmers enjoyed a stable economy which brought prosperity to small communities in the countryside and supported a lively culture. The history of that program and the good that it did has been largely forgotten.

Every day Mr. Berry Sr., and then John, Jr., and Wendell, with the men in the Burley Growers' Co-Op thought about what would best serve farmers and set to work to accomplish it, whether by making speeches, administering the program, or writing. Their work involved numerous trips to Washington to meet with Kentucky's congressional delegation, correspondence, speeches before Congress not to mention hundreds of telephone calls to protect the Program, and thus the Burley Belt farmers. Understanding not only Mr. Berry's authorship but all of their stewardship of this most effective farm program ever devised is necessary to a thorough understanding of the history of agriculture in our state and region.

Annotations in the papers give a fuller picture of the men than would otherwise be available to us. Their thoughts and comments also offer an example to those hoping to turn us from the depredations of industrial agriculture. Far from being inevitable, industrial farming is the result of intentional actions to separate farmers from their land. The lives that are revealed to us in the archives show people with ideas which could counter this ruin and rebuild what has been lost.

Employing production controls and price parity, the foundations of the Program, have been shown to work. The Berry Center is using the writings of the Berry Family in figuring out how best to put these ideas to work in our current agriculture to assure farmers a living wage, grow the numbers of farmers willing to farm well, and to restore land-conserving communities. We are using our history to guide decisions which we hope will make for a restored rural culture.

Wendell says that their father did the important work and that he and his brother John took it up. We, in turn, have taken it up here at The Berry Center. And our best guidepost is the record of their lives. - MG



Papers from the John Berry, Sr. collection of The Berry Center Archives, showing annotations and personal notes in the margins. Photo by the author.

MILK FED, GRASS FED, ROSE VEAL

Sandy Noble Canon, Director
Our Home Place Meat

First, the good news: October 3rd was one of those beautiful crisp fall mornings that we get to enjoy a few weeks of here in the Ohio River valley before the drearier winter sets in. The Henry County Farmers Market was in full swing with a bountiful autumn harvest, and there was a little extra bustle here in New Castle as our colleagues at The Bookstore at The Berry Center marked the kickoff of the 2020 Agrarian Literary League, handing out books to rural readers for the upcoming season. We here at Our Home Place Meat (OHPM) trotted out tables full of local produce, honey, preserves, hot sauce, ice cream, and of course our delicious and ethically-raised and processed pastured Rose Veal, as this day also marked the grand opening of Our Home Place Market, a small but mighty entry into the local food space. This little shop, located in the back of our annex office (known to us as the Yates building, after our dear departed friend Joe, country lawyer par excellence and devoted advocate for small towns everywhere, who practiced in this building for many years), provides an outlet for good local foods and value-added products from our OHPM farmers and neighbors. We are so grateful to our local community for supporting this effort, and we look forward to being able to show you, our more distant neighbors, around the store and introduce you to the lovely and delicious offerings from our Home Place.

And now, the rest: It has been a strange and daunting year for all of us and a challenging one for Our Home Place Meat particularly as our model of cooperative farming and local processing was built on the strength of the American restaurant industry, working with chefs and distributors to provide our quality Rose Veal to customers on the wholesale market. By February we realized, along with many small farmers and producers, that the entire ecosystem of food production would have to turn on a dime if we were to survive. For some, this process has been very fruitful, and we have watched with pride at the multitude of small farms and producers who have been able to increase direct sales and capitalize on the opportunities presented by industrial supply chain interruptions and the malfeasance of large-scale meat processors in particular. We are also happy to see a general raising of awareness around the value of local production and economies. We hope that this awareness will outlive the virus.



Wendell Berry, Chef Edward Lee, Sandy Canon, and Dr. Leah Bayens presenting at The Berry Center Farm.

For Our Home Place Meat, these opportunities were a challenge to pursue. Our model (and our morality) demands that we continue to support the farmers who are raising animals to our high standard. Unlike farmers who sell to the conventional market, our farmers did not see a single cent less for their animals than they were promised before the pandemic. They did not stop raising the best livestock in the region, nor did we slow down the scheduled harvest of Our Home Place Meat at Trackside Butcher Shoppe here in Henry County, Kentucky. We had to find new avenues to share and sell our product, because while retail demand has spiked, for restaurants this has been a catastrophic year.

Initially, it seemed that the industrial food chain had been shattered. Not only could you not find meat stocked at your local big chain grocery store, but even staples like beans, rice, and toilet paper were scarce. We chose to hold monthly sales at Trackside to fill the freezers of our neighbors and to look at other ways to sell direct to the consumer, as restaurant demand collapsed under the weight of the virus and the public health restrictions designed to slow its spread.

One piece of our response has been a testament to the neighborliness that we value here at The Berry Center. As we have seen again and again this year, food insecurity has only become more pervasive as

people lose jobs or see their working hours cut due to the pandemic. In response, communities have come together with nonprofit help to address hunger, both in our region and across the country. We have formed new and exciting partnerships with some of these organizations, particularly the LEE Initiative, whose mission revolves around feeding people equitably and whose vision ranges wide enough to include the countryside where the food to do this comes from. We were fortunate that Chef Edward Lee, visionary chef and the initiative's founder, was able to visit The Berry Center Farm and speak to our Wendell Berry Farming Program students about the community organizing and efforts to ease the hunger of so many people in Louisville and elsewhere. Where Chef Lee's organization differs from more conventional feed-the-hungry efforts is an inherent understanding that charitable donations of food are often expected to come at an unsustainably low price from producers. For large industrial producers, this loss can be absorbed or written off, but for the small and mid-sized farmers producing the healthiest and best food, helping one's neighbor is an unsustainable proposition. Where the LEE Initiative has squared the circle is by leveraging donor money to enable restaurants and feeding programs to buy directly from farmers at a fair price, ensuring that people in need get good food and no one loses the farm for helping his neighbor. In Louisville, the closest city to us geographically, the LEE Initiative is feeding more than 3,000 families a week and rolling out additional initiatives to help hospitality and entertainment workers who are facing job losses and venue closures, public school students and families, and restaurants in marginalized communities in the south. We are proud to be joining in this effort, as well as several more like it such as the Dare to Care Food Bank and Elva's Kitchen Initiative. Thanks to our generous donors we have contributed over \$50,000 worth of product to these feeding efforts, all the while ensuring that the farmers who work year-round to produce this high-quality, ethically raised and harvested meat continue to make a decent living for that work.

As we look toward what comes next, we understand several things. We understand that the restaurant industry as we knew it is likely gone. We've been trying to keep up with the current research and trends and it looks like stabilization of this industry could be as far away as five years. We also know that more people are taking an interest in local food since the industrial food system has proven again and again not to be reliable, nimble or healthy. We are working with the LEE Initiative to identify other communities where we can direct product to aid in the good and vital work of feeding those suffering the most from the downturn of our economy.

All in all, we know that Our Home Place Meat is pivoting toward an increase in direct-to-consumer and retail sales. By growing Our Home Place Market and partnering with groups like Chef Lee's, we are able to get our farmers' product directly into the hands of our neighbors. This doesn't mean we won't be working with restaurants. On the contrary, we have been very fortunate that our restaurant customers in the region are maintaining a strong commitment to local sourcing and Our Home Place Meat Rose Veal, and we will continue to support them in every way that we can.

The times ahead are unknown. One certain fact is that people need to eat, and Our Home Place Meat will continue to do what we can to make sure that ALL people have access to quality, farm-raised meat. We are proud to be a part of this work.

If you would like to support our effort to provide fresh, local, healthy meat to our communities you can donate at www.berrycenter.org/donate or while ordering at www.ourhomeplacemeat.com Your contribution will go directly to our partnerships with organizations like The LEE Initiative, Dare to Care Food Bank, and Elva's Kitchen Initiative. -SNC



Chef Ashland Tann, Sandy Canon and Change Today, Change Tomorrow Program Director Hannah Jones in Louisville, KY.

THE ART OF THE COMMON PLACE

Virginia Berry Aguilar, Director

Agrarian Culture Center and Bookstore at The Berry Center

The 2020 Agrarian Literary League is rapidly becoming the 2020-2021 Agrarian Literary League, and we could not be more excited for the increased interest in our rural reading program. Our featured text, Crystal Wilkinson's "The Birds of Opulence", has proven to be so timely that it will be featured as the 2021 "Kentucky Reads" selection from the Kentucky Humanities Council as well, proving yet again that rural stories are of great value to readers of all backgrounds, and that the desire for a more complex understanding of race, class, and community in rural America is one that should be explored wherever and whenever possible. We are proud to feature this review by Dean of the Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College Dr. Leah Bayens, which originally ran in the Henry County Review of Books column in the Henry County Local. The Review of Books is a unique effort here in Kentucky, and we are proud of the work being done by its founding contributors, our friends Dr. John Inscore Essick of the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky and Port Royal Baptist Church, and Carden Willis of A Place On Earth Farm here in Henry County. Please enjoy the review, and if you would like to join us in reading "The Birds of Opulence" or any other text we carry here in The Bookstore at The Berry Center, please visit berrycenterbookstore.com to learn more and to order.

The Birds of Opulence - Crystal Wilkinson
(University Press of Kentucky, 2016)
Review By Dr. Leah Bayens

The cover of Crystal Wilkinson's novel *The Birds of Opulence* features a brilliant, rainbow-hued rendering of Sankofa, a mythical Ghanaian bird twisting its head and beak around to bring forth an egg from its back. The word sankofa is derived from san (return), ko (go), fa (look, seek, and take). It translates to the guidance that we go back to the past to bring forward what is useful. The past is a path to the present and what may be. This message is at the core of Wilkinson's moving portrayal of the families entwined with each other and the land in the fictional black farming community of Opulence. The landscape and people are modeled after Wilkinson's Indian Creek home place in South Central Kentucky in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Casey County. She sketches generations of the Goode family's lives there, from the town's post-Civil War Reconstruction era founding through

the last four decades of the twentieth century. The story opens with Lucy Goode Brown giving birth to daughter Yolanda in a squash patch, with grandmother Minnie Mae and mother Tookie as midwives. Out of the gate, Wilkinson lets readers in on the power these women possess—the depth of their characters and their connections to land passed down for generations, now through matrilineal lines. In this powerful scene, foretold by the birds, the story captures the essence of the family's struggles and prides: the complexities and pleasures of motherhood, the baffling experiences of mental illness, an abiding devotion to farming in the face of so many forces set against it, and the history of and possibilities for black agrarianism.

As this moving coming-of-age story chronicles young Yolanda's life and the lives of the constellation of family and friends around her, Wilkinson depicts what is and has been so seldom seen and heard in literature and, frankly, in broader conversations of U.S. culture. The novel illustrates a rural African American farming community that has been subject to the atrocities of slavery and its generations-long aftermath. The people dig in, in 1878, and found a town with the help of Old Man Hezekiah, freed from Virginia, who paid one hundred and fifty-six dollars for eight acres of land. When confronted with racist violence and denigration, Hezekiah placed a hand-carved sign across the road proclaiming the place Opulence, illuminated by carved elk, bison, foxes, and birds.

Minnie Mae Goode is his successor. She claims the place and makes a pride out of the disparagement of slavery and segregation. Talking to her sons June and Butter, she explains:

“This is y'all's what-for,' . . . placing one hand on her hip and the other one spreading far and wide from one edge of the knob cross the creek to the other side. The moon is out and the farm is glowing behind her. 'All this,' she says, 'been up under your people's feet since slave times. My mama and daddy worked this land, and their mama and daddy before them.'”

But June and Butter have bought part and parcel into a narrative of progress that tells them city life is real life, and they tell her she ought to just sell the farm. Minnie Mae holds fast to her convictions and says, “Can't see yesterday then you don't know

what's coming your way tomorrow." These words capture the heart of the matter, advice that is especially poignant in these moments of intense tension, violence, discernment, and reckoning.

The novel depicts some of the intra-racial social pressures that drove so many black Kentuckians off the land, all of which occur within the context of inter-racial systemic inequalities and gross violence. According to the 2010 report "Status of African Americans in Kentucky," around the turn of the twentieth century, Kentucky's African American farm families began to move from rural communities to cities. Many black Kentuckians (urban and rural) moved to northern and western cities because of legal segregation. Rural African Americans moved to cities within the state, too. In 1890, seventy-two percent of African American Kentuckians lived in rural areas. By 1910, fifty-nine percent lived in the country. Now, 1.3 percent of the primary farm operators in Kentucky are black, accounting for less than 600 of more than 76,000 agricultural operations. In Henry County in 2017, 3.5 percent of our population identified as African American.

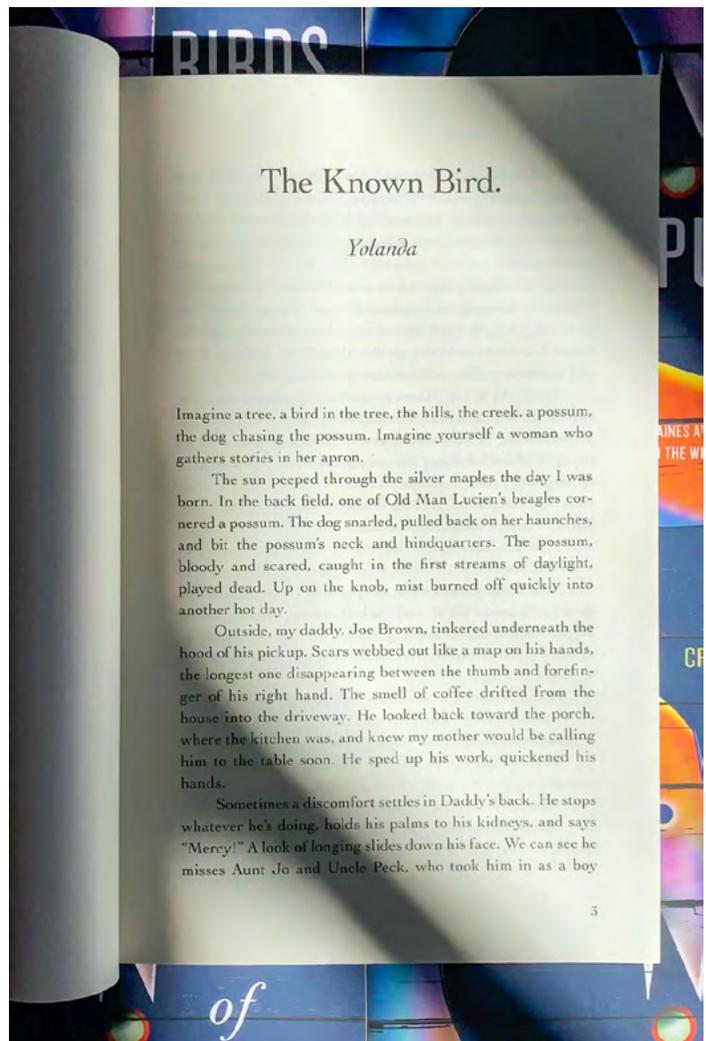
Pete Daniels's book "Dispossession", reviewed by John Inscore Essick in the June 10th edition of The Henry County Local, spells out the protracted, calculated history of black land loss. Bringing it home, Inscore Essick described a recent tour of black-owned farms in Henry County organized by The Berry Center's Agrarian Cultural Center and the NABVETS Kentucky Tri-County Chapter #125. He wrote, "I was surprised to learn that we know of only one black-owned farm in the county. One. And the owner doesn't even live in Henry County. Were there other black-owned farms in Henry County? If so, how many? Where did their farmers go? Why did they leave? What are they doing now?"

Crystal Wilkinson's beautifully crafted novel "The Birds of Opulence" tells an essential story of why and how some black farming families stayed. The story is important for several reasons. It bears witness to lives seldom represented. It holds up voices and histories we ought to listen to and learn from. It illustrates the backstory of racial injustice at the heart of U.S. agriculture while presenting an alternative, palpable example of African Americans farming in ways that are interdependent and empowering.

This portrayal is vital for folks who tend to associate agriculture with subjugation. The novel encourages me to keep learning about the particulars of black farmers and rural landowners in Henry County and elsewhere and to listen and act based on their guidance. Wilkinson provides a glimpse of this

guidance in fictional form. A slate of organizations is also doing the work on the ground. Most notably in Kentucky is Black Soil. Co-founded by Ashley Smith and Trevor Claiborn, Black Soil's mission is "to reconnect black Kentuckians to their legacy and heritage in agriculture," as is Western Kentucky's Russellville Urban Gardening Project. Soul Fire Farm, founded by Leah Peniman in Grafton, New York, has a similar mission. Black-owned agricultural co-operatives across the country have helped African American farmers pool resources and power since the Reconstruction era. The National Black Farmers Association, founded in 1995 by John W. Boyd, Jr., represents and advocates for African American farmers and their families in the U.S. by focusing on civil rights, access to loans and funding, education, rural economic development, and land retention and acquisition. Learn with and from these groups. Learn with and from Wilkinson how to bring forward from the past what is useful for fair, neighborly farm life.

- LB



Crystal Wilkinson's "The Birds Of Opulence" from University Press of Kentucky (2016)



Members of The Berry Center staff and Wendell Berry Farming Program staff and students sending off a donor-supported shipment of Our Home Place Meat to feeding efforts in Jefferson County.



THE BERRY CENTER

Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, published in 1977, awakened a national and global conversation on the dire state of agriculture. The Berry Center was launched in 2011 to continue this conversation and preserve the legacy of Wendell Berry's work and writings and the exceptional agricultural contributions of his father John Berry, Sr., and his brother John Berry, Jr.

Our work seeks to provide solutions to essential issues that are rarely in public discourse and certainly not reflected in agricultural policies. "What will it take for farmers to be able to afford to farm well?" and "How do we become a culture that supports good farming and land use?" These are just a few of the questions that The Berry Center is addressing. We believe that the answers—while firmly rooted in local work—are central to solving some of the world's most pressing problems including the devastation of natural resources and biodiversity, rapid onset of climate change, economic and social inequities, and the collapse of healthy farming and rural communities. We welcome you to join us in this work.



THE BERRY CENTER

111 S. Main Street | Box 582
New Castle, KY 40050
502-845-9200
info@berrycenter.org

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45 S. Main Street | Box 582
New Castle, KY 40050
502-845-9200
info@ourhomplacemeat.com

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Friends, we hope you have enjoyed reading about how our work at The Berry Center is building an alternative to destructive industrial food and farm systems. We believe that successful farming is embedded in ecology, community, culture, and neighborliness. Our programs are building local food models, educating the next generation of farmers, reclaiming rural culture, and honoring agrarian leaders and history that can provide a vision for the future. If you can, please help support this important work with a one-time or recurring gift via our donation portal at berrycenter.org/donate and don't forget that the CARES Act, which is still in effect, allows taxpayers who take the standard deduction to additionally deduct \$300 in charitable gifts in 2020.

For more information please visit the IRS page about charitable contributions under the CARES act at [this link](#).



**Thank you, Friends, for another year of your support in this vital work,
and a very Happy New Year from all our family to yours. - TBC**



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