



THE BERRY CENTER

News from THE BERRY CENTER

SPRING 2021

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TANYA BERRY 1984
PHOTO: JEN BARNHART

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH, a celebration of the strong women we are, we know, and we have known. I will choose this month to honor the women who raised me. Those beautiful and complicated women formed a matriarchy around me where I learned the true meaning of being a woman; to support and love yourself and those around you.

One of those women is my grandmother, Tanya Berry, whom I am honored to be named after. She is the definition of a strong, complicated, and loving woman. I am privileged to have been asked by The Berry Center to interview her for their spring newsletter. To add her voice to the celebration of women. At first, I was elated, excited to hear the history of her move to rural Kentucky and the strengths she gained from other women. But then the nerves set in. She might be



my grandmother but can I do her story justice? That is still to be seen but to hear her tell of her excitement about The Berry Center, the advice she gives, and the stories she holds was one of the highlights of my life.

I will refer to myself as “*SMITH*” during this interview as two Tanya’s can be confusing.

SMITH: Hi Granny, thank you for letting me interview you.

TANYA: Well, it’s no problem.

S: The Berry Center is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. What has impressed you most after 10 years?

T: The success of their various initiatives. Their [Our Home Place Meat] program and with the farming program, and their increasing public light. The ongoing work of the archivist. The work at the bookstore and the outreach that has created. Particularly for me it’s the literary program [that is] bringing all kinds of people in Kentucky together to listen to the fine writers we have here.

S: Was there anything about The Berry Center that you didn’t expect?

T: Yeah, well, it’s success. *Editor’s note:* Following this comment was a lot of laughter from both of us and I added “I knew you would say that!”

T: Really, it’s the support from so many people. Both monetary and psychological support. The whole thing has just been really heartening.

S: It’s been amazing to see that support especially with the Wendell Berry Farming Program. What has been your experience with the farming program?

T: Well, I don’t know a lot about it except the people who participate in it that I’ve met. Mainly the students and teachers who have come to our church in Port Royal. We’ve spent time together eating and getting to know each other. They’ve been wonderful young people. The older people who have been teaching are also wonderful. We’ve been honored to get to know them. So, all in all, it’s been an unbelievable way forward for some young people to get some training to live on the land instead of in the cities.

S: The program is about people and learning to be with people as well. Have you been impressed with the students that you’ve met and are you excited when they join the community?

T: That’s it, for some of them it is to learn to be a part of the community. [They also] bring their various backgrounds into the community so we can see new people with new ideas and new talents.

S: They bring a great diversity to Henry County. I’m certain that if anyone can relate to the first graduating Berry Farming Program students, it would be you. You were thrust into a rural farming community but unlike the students you didn’t have a program for support. How did you adjust to your new life?

T: But I did [have support]! I did have teachers, especially the older women in the family and in the community who helped me learn the skills I needed. [They] showed me a different way of living, one that I had not been around before, the choice of being a woman in the country doing farm and community work.

S: Did you feel like you missed out on that community work growing up? *Editor’s note:* Tanya moved multiple times growing up, back and forth from California and Kentucky. However, she does not mention her moves in our interview.

T: Not growing up, I had my own community of a lot of artists and free thinkers, a lot of people who moved around. But [Henry County] was a different community, in place, and I needed to develop my own support system. It was a great experience for me to learn a different way of living. Some of which I never could do very well, [for instance, taking care of animals]. I wasn’t raised around animals. I was not very good at getting them to go in a certain direction. I never got perfect at that even though I had to do [it] a lot by myself. It was a different way of living.

S: Do you think you adjusted fairly quickly to this different way of living?

T: Well, we had been moving around ever since Wendell and I got married. We lived in different places all over the world and had two children. So, by the time we came here, I really was ready to settle

down and be in a place and I wanted our children to feel at home in a place and stay somewhere. Which they have, so that is really a reward. *Editor's note:* Both of her children, Den and Mary Berry, have stayed in the area with their own farmsteads.

S: But did you ever grieve leaving your previous life?

T: One example of leaving the kind of community I had been in was that I played the flute and when I came here, I didn't have an orchestra to play in or a group to play with. That was different [for me], so I bought a record that had music minus one, it left out the flute part, and I could play along with it. However, it was slightly slower or faster so the tuning of flute was almost impossible to get with the record. That was one instance [of grieving a loss]. But what I did was change finally to doing more piano because I had always [played] piano. Then I ended up playing in the church thanks to my friend Velma Brown who urged me to come play.

S: Did you know Velma well before you went to church there?

T: No.

S: So, you found a community of musicians through that or a different kind of community at least?

T: A different kind, I never thought I'd play Baptist hymns at a Baptist Church but it's wonderful to do. Except during this [pandemic] we can't do it, you know.

S: I'm so sorry, I have always loved listening to you play at church and miss it.

So, while you were joining a new community, you were also building a home. How do you define home?

T: It ought to be a place where people live and are there most of the time. That's the good of the possibility of doing some farming in your life and a reason to be in a home. So many homes these days are empty all day long, they're just bedrooms. It's one thing that this [pandemic] might have taught some people, the value of family life that they haven't had in some time, to maybe eat together, and be together and entertain each other and get along.



TANYA BERRY WITH HER GRANDDAUGHTER TANYA, 1990.
PHOTO COURTESY OF TANYA SMITH.

S: I've heard you talk about how important it is to make a home beautiful as well. Your kitchen has stayed the same most of my life but it has always been one of the most beautiful places to me. Not because of the décor but because you have always had gorgeous wild flower arrangements in it, when you've been able to make them, you made it beautiful.

T: Well, thank you, there's something about keeping a house that is an unending joy, as long as you have the physical [ability] to do it, is seeing what fits where and if it doesn't fit, change it. I wish [that] all people could get that sense of design taught to them in school. Give somebody a sense of proportions, a sense of what looks right and doesn't look right, a sense of light and what you can do with plants in a house and can't do with them. I wish people had more education in the sense of design.

Which of course you get in the farm program. In decent farming you get a sense of how fields should look and be, how the soil should look and be, how the fencerows should look and be. I don't think you get [that] if you're not dealing with either people or animals. Good teachers have that going on, an honorable way of giving information, sharing information to children for instance and have a sense of their rooms in schools. I've seen it among the teachers I know they have a wonderful gift of fixing things so the children enjoy them.

S: Since your family was composed of artists and teachers, do you think you got that sense of aesthetics from them?

T: My aunt and uncle, Dick and Anne O’Hanlon in California, had a bulletin board on which they left messages for each other but it was a work of art, ever changing and nothing was put up there that wasn’t carefully, artistically done. That, in itself, is a lesson on how to do things. How to put flowers in a vase, or just one flower in one vase. How do you do it and where do you put it so it looks the best. That’s what was wonderful about having gardens of food and then flowers in the gardens with the food. To have it all come together finally, aesthetically, perfectly, beautifully. Then finished for the year, cleaned up, the [food] stored in jars to enjoy for the winter and some of the flowers dried so you had something pretty to [look at] in the wintertime.

S: It’s about care, taking care of things, doing it all with care. That’s what farming is, well, good farming.

T: Yes, good farming is seeing it all, being in the middle of it, and not trying to get away from it all the time.

S: So right. But back to your parents, were they surprised when you ended up in rural Kentucky?

T: Oh, probably. They just took it as it came. I think my mother was a little surprised by the way we lived, especially [in the beginning] when we lived at the Homeplace. She was [visiting] and I was washing in the basement. I was heating up water and using these old tubs [to do the washing]. But they [accepted] whatever happened. They trusted Wendell and me and if they didn’t like it, they never said so.

S: I had always wondered how they responded to [your move].

T: Well, my father at one point before I got married to Wendell did say “You do know you’re moving into a different world”. He knew better than I did what was going on. He was older.

S: For those moving into a different world, do you have any advice for anyone pursuing farming? Do you have any advice for the graduating students?

T: Look for people who can show you what to do and how to do, who have done it already. Don’t think you can learn it all out of a book; find a mentor.



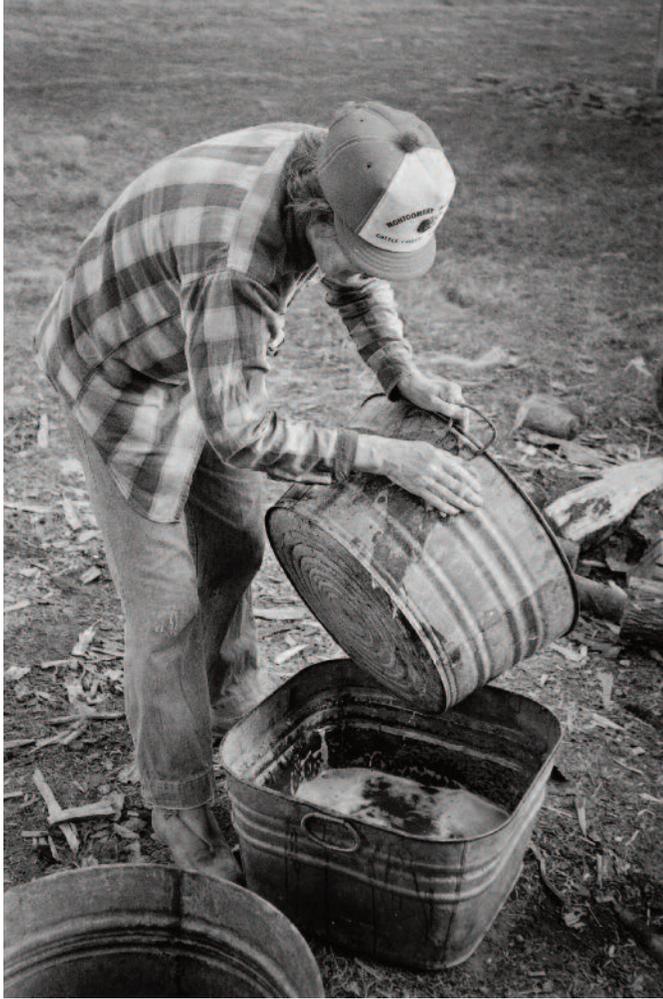
DICK FORD AND WENDELL BERRY RENDERING LARD. FROM *FOR THE HOG KILLING*, 1979, TANYA AMYX BERRY

S: Do you want to give an example [of someone who mentored you]?

T: Well, we got to know Owen and Loyce Flood right away, of course Wendell already knew them very well and I got to know them because for a year and a half we were neighbors of theirs [outside of New Castle]. Loyce showed me a lot about cooking, and a lot about sewing, and a lot about raising children in the country. [She taught me] about working hard all the time in the house and outside of the house, on the farm and loving it. Really [she taught me] how to love somebody who’s doing that work too and be supportive of [the work].

S: In some ways it seems like you connected with your surroundings through your art and photography. Do you think photography helped you fit into the community?

T: No, not really to fit into the community. It was a pleasure for me, but I don’t think community members thought of me as a photographer. That wasn’t the way it was, I was just around with a camera. I did a lot of community work. I was on the library board and I helped start a transportation committee for medical patients who didn’t have any transportation. Doing that kind of work with other people makes you notice the needs [of a community] more than if you stayed isolated from it. Being in church, when I finally started being completely in church and it took a while, that made me feel part of that community. That combined with my music.



LOYCE FLOOD CLEANING BUCKETS USED IN PROCESSING.
FROM *FOR THE HOG KILLING, 1979*, TANYA AMYX BERRY

S: Well, it was a pleasure to see your amazing photography published in *For The Hog Killing, 1979*. How did you feel seeing your photography published?

T: Yeah, that was amazing. To see those photographs brought back [developed and printed] by Ben and Virginia, and then exhibited. Then I saw those photographs differently, I looked at them differently. But we knew so many photographers. [It felt like] everybody was a photographer and most of the photographers we knew were so much better than I was, technically. So, it was just wonderful though, I enjoy thinking about that book and looking at it and giving it to people and thinking about the people who were in the photographs.

S: I love the picture of Loyce washing the tub.

T: Washing the bottom of the tub, I mean, she washed everything.

S: My favorite picture is an odd one, but I think it describes you well, and please don't take that the wrong way when I tell you which one it is. But it's

the photo where the pig heads are hanging on the fence and the other pigs are looking at them in the background. I think you have a keen sense of irony which comes through in the photo. You're stoic but with a sense of humor.

T: I'm glad you looked at that one. You know I looked at it after they were developed again and that picture in particular, why I took it, I don't know but I did. There it is, the hogs being perfectly at ease with their dead brethren hanging on the fence in front of them. That's the tone of the whole hog killing, it wasn't slaughtering or murdering mayhem. It was doing a decent job of providing food for everybody who was there for the next year and not scaring the hogs before they died.

S: That's beautiful, Granny. It's how things should be. Now, your daughter likes to refer to you as complicated. Do you see yourself as complicated?

T: I hope everybody thinks I'm complicated. I'm not actually complicated but it suits me fine for people to think that.

S: Is there anything else you'd like to add that I might not have covered?

T: Well, being interviewed by my granddaughter who's my namesake is much of an honor.

S: I can't agree more. I think you're an amazing woman and I'm honored to interview you, but I'm especially honored to be named after you.

T: It's a pretty amazing happening.

After the interview Tanya and I spoke more about the wildflowers of Henry County and understanding our place through them. We have agreed to document the flowers this spring and share them with you in the fall in the next Berry Center newsletter, so you can have beautiful things to look at this winter.

If you are interested in purchasing a copy of Tanya Berry's book, *For The Hog Killing, 1979*, follow this link to the [Bookstore at The Berry Center](#).

I don't know if I've done her story justice, but I know I will continue to learn from her just as I always have.

—TANYA SMITH



PROGRAM UPDATES

THE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS OF THE BERRY CENTER IN FRONT OF CREATION GARDEN'S DISTRIBUTION TRUCK. LEFT TO RIGHT: ASHLAND TANN, DR. ED FREDRICKSON, SANDY CANON, LOREN CARLSON, MARY BERRY, BETH DOUGLAS, CREATION GARDEN EMPLOYEE.

OUR HOME PLACE MEAT

WHAT A RIDE WE WERE ON IN 2020! While the world was awaiting a vaccine, Our Home Place Meat (OHPM) was feeding people—lots of people. You may remember that Tanya and Wendell Berry gave a \$10,000 matching gift to support our community outreach initiative in the fall of 2020 so we could provide protein—an often missing ingredient for food-insecure families—to rural and urban communities of Henry County and Louisville, Kentucky.

Because of the support from the Berry family, our members, and national foundations we were able to:

- ♥ Raise more than \$43,000 to support our local outreach initiative.
- ♥ Provide over 9,000 pounds of humanely grown and harvested Rose Veal.
- ♥ Feed over 30,000 families and individuals during the holiday season.
- ♥ Partner with over 10 local food banks and hunger relief organizations.



9,000 POUNDS OF HEALTHY ROSE VEAL READY TO BE DISTRIBUTED WITH HELP FROM CREATION GARDENS TO FEED JEFFERSON COUNTY FAMILIES THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS EVE.



OHPM FARMER ABBIE MONROE AND SON ANGUS OF HENRY COUNTY, TEND TO THEIR ANGUS CATTLE ON THE FAMILY'S VALLEY SPIRIT FARM.

♥ Provide additional meat in 2021 because the donations keep coming thanks to our members.

It was so gratifying to build new partnerships and to show these grassroots heroes that OHPM isn't just here for the holidays, but we are here to help throughout the year providing necessary quality nutrition at a high level. We are humbled to be a part of this effort.

Without you—our members—we never would have been able to do it. Thank you.

Our year ended up being quite something, and not in a way any of us had predicted. With the restaurant industry collapsing, we were very concerned about meeting our objective of ensuring a stable income for small family farmers and offering exceptional meat to consumers. We shifted our thinking and pivoted our program model. In 2020 we actually increased sales and were able to achieve our goals with direct sales to consumers (in lieu of restaurant sales) through our newly opened Our Home Place Market and our monthly online box sales.

“Eat with
a clear
conscience.”

—WENDELL
BERRY

OHPM 2020 Accomplishments:

- ♥ Dollars earned by local farmers through OHPM: \$140,197
- ♥ Parity price for farmers, average amount over stock market price: \$286 per animal
- ♥ Increased sales over 2019: 506%

If you would like to continue your support, shop for Rose Veal, or see store hours please visit our website at www.ourhomeplacemeat.com. Your contribution will go directly to our partnerships with food initiatives such as The Lee Initiative, Dare to Care Food Bank, and Elva's Kitchen Initiative, Children Shouldn't Hunger, Creation Gardens, Change Today Change Tomorrow, Henry County Help Center (and more) to continue our efforts to provide fresh, local, healthy meat to our communities.

—SANDY NOBLE CANON
Director of Our Home Place Meat

THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE

GOOD NEWS! There's still time to apply for the Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College. We are accepting applications through April 1, 2021, for the second cohort of twelve students. This full-time, two-year, tuition-free, liberal arts farmer education program is located in Henry County, Kentucky. In combination with previously-earned credits, students earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sustainable Agriculture from Sterling College, a member of the Work Colleges Consortium. We invite applications from farmers and aspiring farmers from Kentucky and elsewhere in the U.S.

The curriculum kindles agrarianism—"a way of thought based on land, . . . a practice, a set of attitudes, a loyalty, and a passion" arising "from the fields, woods, and streams—from the complex of soils, slopes, weathers, connections, influences, and exchanges that we mean when we speak, for example, of the local community or the local watershed" (Berry, "The Whole Horse" 239). Through agrarian studies, we are learning how to be good neighbors and stewards of the land, air, and water by being able to afford to farm well.

Our goal is unique in agricultural education: to interweave a hands-on, liberal arts farming curriculum with a diversified mid-scale livestock farm using appropriately scaled power, from draft animals to tractors. Our liberal and practical arts courses are geared toward the survival of small and mid-scale farms, so we study how to be profitable within ecological bounds. We seek out examples of community cohesion that are essential and worthy, and we come to terms with a collective, inherited history of violence against the land and the people. We are trying to shape a culture that supports good farming and land use that is equitable, diverse, parity-based, and resilient.

To this end, students work with neighboring farmers, economists, advocacy groups, and The Berry Center staff. Much of our work and learning takes place on The Berry Center Farm, a 200-acre parcel of land in Port Royal, Kentucky, which is ideally suited for grass farming and diversity of livestock. The farm has 50 acres of woodland that will benefit from a "worst-first" management plan aimed to improve the health



WBFP STUDENTS AT THE BERRY CENTER FARM AFTER A RURAL LITERATURE CLASS SESSION.

of the woods while providing lumber, a small income, and a classroom. The work of mules, oxen, and horses is combined with combustion tools. Ultimately, the WBFP uses grass, livestock, and forest like three legs of a stool in a model that is biologically based and economically viable. Wendell Berry says of the curriculum, "This farming program is exactly what most needs doing here."

Henry County is our classroom because we value local cultures and the land community. We hitch together culture and agriculture, the arts and the sciences. Agrarian studies and the humanities are at the heart of our hands-on courses. We connect literature, history, cultural studies, and the arts ("high" and "low") to agroecology, draft animal and mixed power systems, forestry, business, policy, and rural leadership. This way, a farmer makes decisions informed by experience, research, and conversations with neighbors as well as by history and poetry. The approximately 60-credits of coursework culminates in graduates' farm business and production plans, completed through a capstone senior year project.



WBFP STUDENTS HOUSING TOBACCO AT A LOCAL FARM. PHOTO: LEAH BAYENS

We are looking for people to join us in this good work, folks who:

- 🍷 Are farming now or who intend to make a vocation of farming
- 🍷 Are interested in the well-being of small communities and rural places
- 🍷 Are looking for a college experience in which student life depends on their involvement in the neighborhood
- 🍷 Work well in groups, especially across differences

Sterling College is committed to serving diverse populations, especially for addressing the Wendell Berry Farming Program’s most pressing question: How can we foster land-conserving communities in which people can afford to farm well? We think part of the answer lies in diversity: of ecology, race, gender, age, marketing, economics, history, religion, education, and political affiliations. We call together at the table farmers who produce for conventional markets and those who farm for alternative markets. We work to close gaps between rural and urban. We take stock of the roots of racism, sexism, and classism—of the “inordinate desire to be superior” and the “wish to rise above the bother and sweat of taking care of anything,” as Wendell Berry writes in “Racism and the Economy.” We envision healthy, just communities by cultivating neighborly leaders, cooperative economies, and equitable cultures.

In Wendell Berry’s book “The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership,” the ever-raucous

character Burley Coulter says to his lawyer friend Wheeler Catlett:

“The way we are, we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain’t in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don’t” (136–137). Burley’s idea that we are “members of each other. All of us. Everything.” is about as inclusive a definition of membership as you’ll find.

He’s saying that we’re connected and responsible to one another—and the land, whether we know it or not and whether we acknowledge it or not. We’re always and already members of agrarian communities and agrarian lineages. So in our classes, we think about and try to live out the responsibilities this membership requires of us and also the perks of that membership, too.

The first cohort of WBFP students is preparing to graduate in May 2021. Over the last two years, our understanding of the rights and responsibilities of this membership has grown exponentially. Our connections to each other and the land community have been fomented and forged through our work. We are eager to continue and to expand this lineage as we welcome new members.

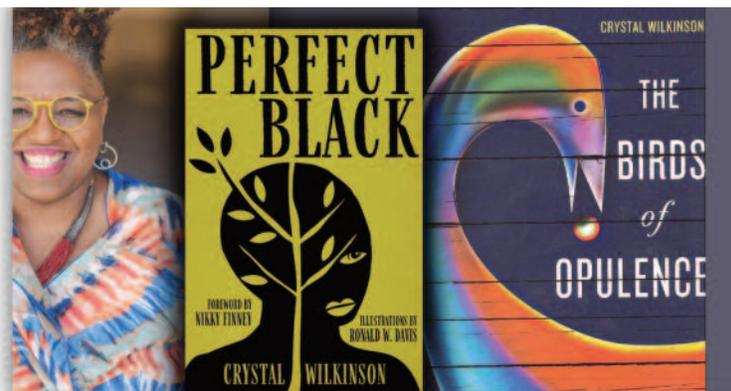
For more information, please contact Admission Counselor Krystal Graybeal (kgraybeal@sterlingcollege.edu).

—LEAH BAYENS, PH.D.
Dean and Director, WBFP of Sterling College

THE AGRARIAN CULTURE CENTER AND BOOKSTORE

Over the past few weeks I have revisited two beloved books in anticipation of their author's new titles that will be released this fall. First is Margaret Renkl's *Late Migration: A Natural History of Love and Loss*, published by Milkweed Editions in 2019. These short reflections on the author's life and devoted family are interspersed with observations of the natural world that reveal themselves in Ms. Renkl's suburban Nashville backyard. Her watchfulness and knowledge of the wildlife that share her place are admirable examples of what it is possible to know, and remind me of a line of Wendell's that we repeat often in our home, "there are no unsacred places." Ms. Renkl's prose is beautiful and often had me reading aloud, at times searching out my husband so that I could share a particularly moving passage. Perhaps, like me, you will share page 15 in a group chat with your mother and sisters.

With the affection I feel for *Late Migration*, I am impatiently awaiting Ms. Renkl's new book, *Graceland, At Last: And Other Essays From The New York Times* which will be released September 14. If you would like to join me in this eager anticipation, you can preorder *Graceland* from our [online shop](#).

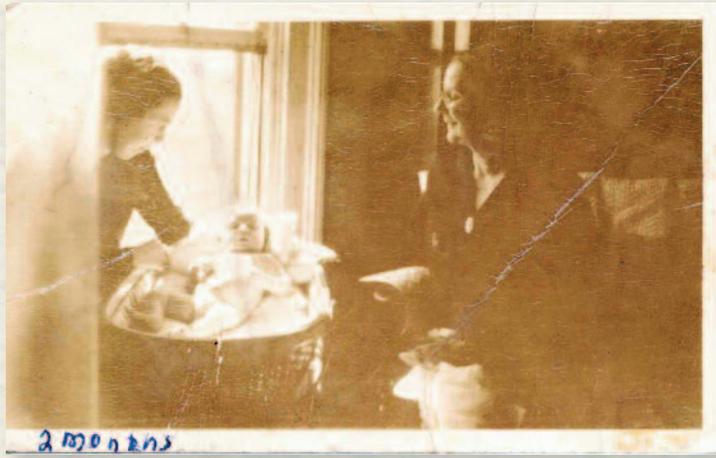


Next is a book that I am happy to return to again and again, *The Birds of Opulence* (University Press of Kentucky, 2016) by fellow Kentuckian Crystal Wilkinson. Ms. Wilkinson's vivid portrayal of the fictional rural black community of Opulence, Kentucky, its people, their traditions and struggles, the exodus of young people, and the hope of a home place, feels deeply familiar. Her agrarian voice is unique and valuable, and so everyone at The Berry Center is looking forward to a new collection of poetry and essays arriving August 3 from University Press of Kentucky. *Perfect Black*, with an introduction by Nikky Finney and illustrations by Ronald W. Davis, is the author's first published collection of poetry and deals with topics such as Black girlhood, racism, and political awareness. A sneak peak at a review copy of the book shows a lyricism throughout that will capture the imagination of any reader, whether the experiences of a young, rural, black woman are something familiar or foreign.

Preorder your copy of *Perfect Black* by visiting our [website](#).

As ever, I remain hopeful that it will be safe to meet in person for events like our Kentucky Arts and Letters Day later in the year. As we plan and adjust, awaiting expert guidance, you can keep up with the latest by visiting our [Facebook page](#) or [website](#).

—VIRGINIA BERRY AGUILAR
Director of Agrarian Culture Center & Bookstore



WENDELL BERRY 1934 WITH HIS MOTHER VIRGINIA BERRY (LEFT). COURTESY OF TANYA BERRY

To My Mother

I was your rebellious son,
do you remember? Sometimes
I wonder if you do remember,
so complete has your forgiveness been.

So complete has your forgiveness been
I wonder sometimes if it did not
precede my wrong, and I erred,
safe found, within your love,

prepared ahead of me, the way home,
or my bed at night, so that almost
I should forgive you, who perhaps
foresaw the worst that I might do,

and forgave before I could act,
causing me to smile now, looking back,
to see how paltry was my worst,
compared to your forgiveness of it

already given. And this, then
is the vision of that Heaven of which
we have heard, where those who love
each other have forgiven each other,

where, for that, the leaves are green,
the light a music in the air,
and all is unentangled,
and all is undismayed.

WENDELL BERRY—*New Collected Poems*, Counterpoint, 2012



BEYOND THE BERRY CENTER

FARMERS STAGE SITTING PROTEST ON THE ROAD TO DELHI. PHOTO: RANDEEP MADDOKE, 2020

I HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING with much interest the ongoing farmer protests in India, and recently I happened across an op-ed by Dr. Supreet Kaur, an economist at the University of California-Berkeley, on NBC News' *Think* masthead about the ongoing farmer protests in India entitled "*India's farmers are protesting authoritarianism disguised as capitalism. Sound familiar?*" For those unaware, over the last six months the Indian subcontinent has seen what are in all likelihood the largest general strikes, work stoppages, and protests in human history in response to a set of new agricultural policies put in place by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These laws would fundamentally remake the Indian agricultural sector which employs, directly or indirectly, somewhere north of two-thirds of the population. Sixty-six percent of 1.3 billion is a great many people who are directly affected by these measures, and so the single-day estimates of 250 million Indians out in the streets protesting against them would not surprise me in the least. What also does not surprise me, sadly, is that here in the United States we've hardly heard a peep about it, and what little coverage it does receive has me thinking about a particular type

of economic fundamentalism we routinely partake in here in the West.

The agricultural economy in India is organized in a way that Americans today have little experience with, though our Appalachian forebears would find at least the scale of things more familiar. The average farm size for most of India is something like two and a half acres, and production in excess of subsistence (particularly cereal crops) is purchased from small farmers by the government at a guaranteed price and sold on to the public at nationally owned shops (with subsidies for low income populations), thereby protecting smaller operations from prices crashing due to surplus production from good growing seasons, market flooding by less upstanding larger producers, or naked market manipulation by the industrial agriculture sector (these last two have been, unsurprisingly, great supporters of both the BJP and the new policies). These new laws functionally rewrite this system, removing the meager protections and supports that farmers currently depend upon and replacing them with a *free market* that is only really free of public accountability or democratic oversight (flawed as they may be).



THE BERRY CENTER FARM AT SUNRISE. PHOTO: ED FREDRICKSON

Those of you familiar with the history of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative that we study here at the Center, or any of the other price-support programs that came into being with the New Deal might be nodding along right now, and I'm sorry to say that the result of those programs ending will likely be repeated in India unless the protests are successful, and continue to be so in perpetuity. While it took us about a hundred years to get from 40% of the population farming to one percent, you can expect that consolidation to go much more quickly in South Asia due to the ever-increasing pace of technological advances and the sophistication of predatory *economic development*. Where this leaves the largest agricultural population on the planet is yet to be determined, though our own long, sad history of farm bankruptcies and vacant countryside, rural collapse and the diseases of despair that follow on after should be put forward as a cautionary tale. To those who might disagree, citing the *endemic poverty* or *political corruption* of the Indian subcontinent, well, we've got plenty of that here too, and neither situation can be blamed on the market providing too much for small farmers' wellbeing.

Our own example was top of mind as I finished the article, which is a competently written and well-cited review of the situation that, in my opinion, misses the mark considerably when it comes to both description

and prescription on the problem. Dr. Kaur is surely knowledgeable on the subject, with an extensive history of work in the region. Her piece, however, makes very little mention of the origins or value of the post-colonial, post-green-revolution programs which are the foundation of the small farm economy in India, instead stating in the closing paragraph that "There's no doubt that improving farmers' economic fortunes requires liberalizing the agricultural sector and allowing the free market to play more of a central role." Respectfully, it appears that at least 250 million people have indeed expressed some doubt on this issue. I would express some doubt myself, having seen what a *free market* has done to the small farms and farmers of this country.

This is an example of the kind of thinking that we take for granted here in the States, that the market will sort it out and leave everyone the better off for it. We know, from the last hundred years of U.S. farm policy to the last few weeks of catastrophic weather in Texas, that an ideological commitment to the *free market* does precious little to foster a humane society. Will granting the global agriculture industry free rein in remaking the largest agrarian economy on the planet improve the living and working conditions of the rural people on this Earth? I wouldn't bet the farm on it.

—BEN AGUILAR

The Berry Center Director of Operations

“What is important to me about the Berry Center, and what I am learning from it, is its willingness to go to work at home, on a small scale, to improve the economy of local farmers and, therefore, the health of the local land. This is radical now, when public attention is all on global solutions to global problems. But what works here is likely to work elsewhere, whereas a global solution that won’t work locally is a waste of time.” —WENDELL BERRY



LETTER FROM MARY BERRY

WBFP STUDENT AMELIA ZENERINO'S FARM IN HENRY COUNTY. PHOTO: ABIGAIL BOBO

I MENTIONED THE FACT that 2021 marks The Berry Center’s 10th year of existence in the fall/winter newsletter but the time has gone so quickly and there is so much to do that it hasn’t seemed real to me. Until I spoke to Bob Sandmeyer’s Food Ethics Class at the University of Kentucky recently. (I’m sorry to say that it was a Zoom meeting which is the way we do things now but it certainly is a poor replacement for being with the people you’re talking too.) The students had submitted very good questions before the meeting. A student named Brooke Morris asked, “How has The Berry Center improved over time?” The question surprised me and has caused me to think about the last 10 years and the work of the Center.

It seems to me that good work in a particular place must start with an inventory of what one has to work with. Agriculture went wrong when, along with the

rest of the culture, it began to think big. My father has called for us to “Think Little.” Inherent in this is the need for people who know and love particular places going to work on what is right in front of them to do. What works locally is likely to work elsewhere, whereas a global solution that won’t work locally is a waste of time. How much money and time has been wasted by people unwilling to except the truth of this? An inventory takes into consideration what is here right now that is of use and worth saving. It then asks us to think about what is not here that should be here. This kind of thinking gets to the right questions. The right questions show us how to get to work.

Henry County is on the northern edge of Kentucky’s Bluegrass Region. It is still broken up into small farms but much less farming goes on here than when I was a child. There are many acres of land in corn and



WENDELL BERRY LAUGHING WITH FRIENDS AT PORT ROYAL FARM STORE. PHOTO: ETHAN PAYNE, *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*

soy bean production, much of it on fields my father, who is 86, has never seen plowed and should never be plowed. The grain farming that has taken the place of the diversified farming of my childhood is an environmental and economic disaster. Ironic that the tobacco economy which was lost at least partly due to health concerns has been replaced by toxic, erosive commodity grain farming. Our farmers are caught between the large and dominant industrial agriculture and small and entrepreneurial farming with almost nothing in the middle.

The inventory I started with included:

- ♥ A well-watered countryside suited to perennial agriculture.
- ♥ A state that still has thousands of small farms.
- ♥ Small farmers who knew how to farm each year not at the next year's cost.
- ♥ The remnants of a once strong agrarian culture.
- ♥ A population of passionate farmers who had the passion to farm.
- ♥ Some evidence that there was a public demand by the state's urban people for an abundant, sustainable supply of fresh, healthful, tasty food.
- ♥ The history of an agricultural co-op that protected the land and the people from over production and kept pricing fair for the state's farmers.

We knew that we wanted to save the information in my grandfather and uncle's papers about the Burley

Tobacco Growers Co-operative Association and put the working principles of its program to use for the small farmers in our state. Michele Guthrie, our archivist, went to work to develop an archive for our use and the use of scholars who want to understand how the only program that served the interest of small farmers from its inception worked for the good of the people it was supposed to serve. That archive has grown to include art that celebrates our rural culture, papers from my father, and a lending library for our community and the students in our farm program.

The history of the Producer's Program, which was what the Burley Program was called and indeed was, needs to be used to serve the saving remnant of farmers we have left. That history lives in Our Home Place Meat (OHPM). This program is the bridge needed between our good livestock farmers and the marketplace. It employs the concept of parity in pricing and carefully matches supply with demand for our premium product. Our country is in desperate need of good examples of parity pricing coupled with production controls; we believe that Our Home Place Meat is one.

Because market forces have been allowed to destroy much of our land and thereby the people that should belong to the land (the two should never have been separated) we now have less than three--quarters-of-one-percent farming in this country. We knew in 2011 that we needed to work on our country's desperate need for more good farmers and we needed to deal with the miseducation of young people who want to farm. It was important to me that the degree would have a strong liberal arts component. The Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College in Henry County is our effort to rebuild a population of good farmers.

Because we don't just have an agricultural problem, we have a cultural problem, especially in our depopulated rural places, we started The Bookstore at The Berry Center that is the birthplace of The Agrarian Culture Center. The culture center is bringing programming that celebrates the art and literature that tells the story of our agrarian history. It is the birthplace of The Agrarian Literary League that for years has brought people together to read a book chosen each year for its cultural value so that community members can remember and reflect on their shared history and

honor local knowledge. The reading list and supporting materials are available to other communities to do the same.

Thinking about the last ten years and the work that has been done here has made me think about a new inventory. And this is a hopeful undertaking as has been the work of the Center.

♥ We have a group of passionate, small farmers working together on Our Home Place Meat. Smart men and women who, even under economic stress themselves, are able to work together for the greater good of the group. (The average age of the farmers in OHPM is forty, twenty-two years younger than the average farmer in Kentucky.)

♥ We have over 400 people participating in The Agrarian Literary League who have started twenty some book groups in our county.

♥ We have preserved the knowledge it took to start the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association and made it accessible and usable for ourselves and others.

♥ We have students on the ground in Henry County working with the fine faculty of Sterling College and the local community to learn about sustainable farming and forestry.

♥ We have a good farm on which the students can study and work.

♥ We have the hope of OHPM to encourage and support young farmers who want to live a farming life.

♥ We have a staff of eight people who get up every day to do the work of the Center. I could not have foreseen that this would happen and it seems nothing short of miraculous that it has.

♥ We have a committed Board of Directors who have supported our work every way they can and put up with an Executive Director who knew how to farm, loved farming and farming people, and not much of anything about running a non-profit, making the board essential to the survival of the Center.

♥ And, if you are reading this, we have you. The membership of the Center is a marvel to me. Your interest and support, however you give it, has



WBFP'S KATAHDIN SHEEP FLOCK AT THE BERRY CENTER FARM
PHOTO: ABIGAIL BOBO

made all the difference to me, to my family, and to our staff. My father has said, and I have echoed, that our work is way out on the margins of the way things are now. You have strengthened us, helped us, supported us and it has made all the difference.



March is Women's History Month. This matters to me. I am the mother of three daughters and the grandmother of three granddaughters. I have loved and been inspired by the strong, strong willed, and hilarious women in my family. The farm women that I grew up around and was taught by, my mother being chief among them, fill my thoughts every day. And now, my days are spent with the mostly female staff of The Berry Center who are farmers, business women, teachers, and forces of nature. The Berry Center Board is primarily women. They have brought their experiences of farming, finance, work with other nonprofits, writing, teaching, philanthropy, and community organizing, to name just a few of their accomplishments, to the work at the Center. In particular I am grateful for my friend Christy Brown without whom the Center would not exist. I, of course, am grateful to her for her financial support but greater still was, and is, her encouragement to go on and do what I knew needed to be done. She made me believe that I could do this and has stood beside me every step of the way.

Thank you as always for your interest in the Center and for all you do in your own communities.

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



REBECCA PHILLIPS

AS WE CELEBRATE our 10-year anniversary we are proud to announce Becky Phillips has joined The Berry Center Board of

Directors as our new treasurer. We would also like to thank our outgoing treasurer, Mary Jones, who will remain on the Board. She has put in hours of her time over four-plus-years helping our organization grow and stay on track with our financial and fundraising goals. We look forward to collaborating with Becky as we start the next chapter of The Berry Center.

Becky joined The Berry Center's Board of 2021. She is a partner at MCM CPAs & Advisors and is the Not-for-Profit and Government Services Team

Leader. In addition to providing audit services for not-for-profit organizations and local governments, she is a frequent speaker on topics related to not-for-profit organizations, governance, and fraud. Becky advises exempt organizations on everything from strategic direction and effective use of resources to process improvement and board governance.

Becky is a Louisville native and is actively involved in the Louisville community, currently serving on the boards of directors of both the Louisville Zoo Foundation, for which she is vice-chair, and the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, for which she is treasurer. She is also a board member of Leadership Louisville Foundation and serves as a member of the Louisville U.S. Bank Advisory Board.

She earned both her Bachelor's and Master of Business Administration from the University of Louisville and was a member of Uof L's tenured faculty in the College of Business from 1985 until 1999.



MAGGIE KEITH

Maggie Keith is a fourth-generation steward of Foxhollow Farm, a Biodynamic Farm Community in Crestwood, Kentucky. In 2007, Maggie used her business degree and love of food and the outdoors to

convert her family's 1300-acre farm from a conventional three-crop rotation operation to a Biodynamic farm raising grassfed beef. Since 2008, Maggie has been selling and marketing 100% grassfed beef. In 2017, she grew the business, launching Foxhollow Delivery, a subscription delivery service bringing Foxhollow Farm's grassfed beef to homes through-

out the continental USA. For the past 11 years, she and her Mom have worked together with the head herdsman of Foxhollow to grow their herd from 30 to 450 beef cattle. They have also built a community of fellow entrepreneurial Biodynamic farmers who work and live on Foxhollow Farm.

Along with managing the business operations of the farm, Maggie is passionate about growing, harvesting, and cooking food! She grows a variety of heirloom vegetables, along with a pick your own pumpkin patch. Maggie is a co-host of the television show, The Farmer and The Foodie and serves on the board of Dare to Care Food Bank. Her goals are to grow more farmers, advocate for grassfed beef and Biodynamic Farming, and encourage everyone to take the time to enjoy a meal around the table with friends and family. Maggie lives on Foxhollow Farm with her two young children and husband, Benton Keith.



2021 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

“The world is in fact full of free things that are delightful. Flowers. The world is also full of people who would rather pay for something to kill the dandelions than to appreciate the dandelions. Well, I’m a dandelion man myself.” —WENDELL BERRY, *LOOK AND SEE*



- 4/22 Earth Day
- 4/22 The Berry Center Archives Virtual Lecture Series with Sterling College’s Dr. Leah Bayens of The Wendell Berry Farming Program
- 4/24 Independent Bookstore Day
- 4/24 The Berry Center 10th Anniversary Spring Open House
- 5/12 Kentucky Gives Day
- 5/15 Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College Inaugural Commencement
- 6/24 The Berry Center Archive Virtual Lecture Series II
- 7/31 Henry County Harvest Showcase
- 8/5 Wendell Berry’s Birthday
- 9/16 The Berry Center Archive Virtual Lecture Series III
- 9/17 Give For Good Louisville
- 9/25 Agrarian Literary League Fall Festival
- 11/10 Agrarian Culture Center Kentucky Arts & Letters Day
- 12/16 Berry Center Archive Virtual Lecture Series IV

Look for monthly Rose Veal Box Sale emails from Our Home Place Meat.



Celebrating 10 years of putting Wendell Berry’s writings to work by advocating for farmers, land conserving communities, and healthy regional economies.



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.

Please Support Our Work and Become a Member of The Berry Center

www.berrycenter.org/donate

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SANDY NOBLE CANON, Director, Our Home Place Meat
BETH DOUGLAS, Marketing Manager, Our Home Place Meat
MICHELE GUTHRIE, Archivist, Archive at The Berry Center
BEN AGUILAR, Director of Operations
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THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE FACULTY

LEAH BAYENS, PH.D, Dean and Director, Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College
RICK THOMAS, Faculty in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems
DR. ED FREDRICKSON, Visiting Faculty in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems

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