



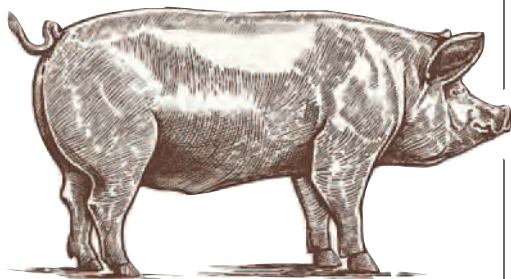
THE BERRY CENTER

News from THE BERRY CENTER

FALL 2021

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“stay together
learn the flowers
stay light”

—GARY SNYDER



GRANDDAUGHTER AND
GRANDMOTHER,
TANYA SMITH AND TANYA BERRY,
FIND BLUE LETTUCE AT
LANES LANDING FARM



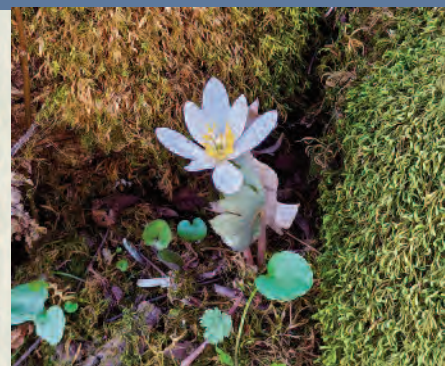
AMONG THE WILDFLOWERS



BELLROOT



BITTERCRESS



BLOODROOT

WHEN I THINK OF WILDFLOWERS, I think of my grandmother, Tanya Berry. Growing up, I would watch her create beautiful arrangements for her home, neighbors, and church. More often than not, her kitchen has a bouquet proudly displayed on the woodstove. What I love most is that these flowers always carry a story of places and people. Sometimes the arrangements come from Granny's mornings spent looking for new blooms, from Granddaddy finding them on his walks in the woods, and from friends excited to share what they have discovered. Every arrangement is beautiful, and every one is treasured.

FLORAL PHOTOS BY TANYA SMITH

BLUEBELL



CAROLINA VETCH



CHICKWEED



“Wildflowers don’t make a sound. They don’t have to. Their splendor in itself attracts all the attention needed.”

—DAVID KLINE



COLUMBINE



COMMON CINQUEFOIL



DAISY



DUTCHMAN'S BREECHES



FALSE SOLOMON SEAL

In the Spring 2021 Newsletter, I interviewed Granny for women’s history month. We discussed her love of wildflowers and how we can understand our place through them. Afterward, I realized I didn’t know the names of the flowers I grew up around. So, Granny and I decided we should document the spring flowers and share them with you here.

Our weekly wildflower searches began at the end of March. Granny called, letting me know that Granddaddy saw bluebells and bloodroot coming up nearby. After this discovery, she drove down Ford Lane, Cane Run Road, and Long Branch Road—her favorite places to find wildflowers and where we would be looking for the next two months to see the early spring wildflowers blooming. We agreed to start our drives that week.

“Well, what time do you get up in the morning?” Granny asked while we were discussing when to meet. I could sense her concern that I was going to say 10:00 AM, which is unthinkable late to her.

“Don’t worry, Granny, I wake up at 6:00 most mornings.” “Oh, good! Let’s meet at 9:30. The light will be good then.”

The first trip was on a sunny spring morning. I walked into the kitchen to find Granny trying to hurry Granddaddy out the door; his truck was blocking her car, and she wanted to get moving. He did not match her urgency. He does not hurry; that is not his way. As I giggled to myself, Granny went over the plan for the drive. We would visit Ford Lane first, then Cane Run Road, and finally Long Branch Road. While discussing how we would track the flowers we find, I realized I had forgotten my notebook. As I apologized, she disappeared into another room and returned with a red journal with a large flower on the cover: “This will be perfect for your notes.”

As we drove from road to road, I gained a deeper understanding of how significant wildflowers are to Granny. To her, the roads are the flowers on them. They connect her to this place.

Granny tells me of Granddaddy’s mother, Virginia Berry, writing to them when they lived in Italy.

In the letters, she would describe the wildflowers that were blooming. Each letter gave Granddaddy a piece of home. Virginia was his first and main influence. Her love for wildflowers inspired Granddaddy’s

FIRE PINK



FLEABANE



GOLDEN ALEXANDER



GRAPE HYACINTH



HAIRY BUTTERCUP



HAWKSBEARD



HYACINTH



JACK IN THE PULPIT



LARKSPUR



LYRE LEAF SAGE



MAYAPPLE



MIAMI MIST



PHLOX



RED CLOVER

writing, and his love spread to Granny. Once they returned and settled in Port Royal, Granny took her mother, Dee Amyx, down Ford Lane. She described the joy Dee felt over purple phlox carpeting the forest floor. Now Granny is sharing this joy with me.

That first day we saw spring beauties, twinleaf, bloodroot, rue anemone, trout lily, bluebells, phlox, and Dutchman's breeches. After we return to the kitchen, Granny reminded me to write down that we saw dandelions, emphasizing the importance of every flower.

"Oh yes, that rare beauty. You know, I am a dandelion man myself," Granddaddy mused. Granny, ignoring him, asked me, "Have you seen the violets out front?"

As the weeks progressed, I began to learn and identify the flowers. Every new flower was exciting, a new name to remember, a new mystery to uncover. If Granny didn't know a flower's name, we identified it with a combination of my "machine" (how Granny refers to my cellphone) and *A Guide to the Wildflowers and Ferns of Kentucky*. Through these methods, we identified almost all of the flowers we found. We had significant trouble identifying only one flower, though we eventually discovered that it was a great waterleaf. I still lovingly call it "the flower we argue about."

My favorite discovery happened at the end of April. Granny had mentioned many times that she hoped

“We went together to learn the flowers’ names. We spent time together with our own great ignorance of what is persisting around us without our help or acknowledgement. We learned about ourselves and our miraculous world. What could be a greater adventure? What could be a greater pleasure?” —GRANNY



SHOOTING STAR



SPIDERWORT



SPRING BEAUTY



STAR OF BETHLEHEM



WENDELL BERRY HELPS TO COLLECT WILDFLOWERS.

we would see a specific flower, but she had only found it once before in all her time in Henry County. As we drove down Ford Lane, I saw an odd-looking green flower I had never seen before. It was large, cylindrical, and hooded. After I got out and looked more closely, we realized that it was a Jack-in-the-pulpit. The flower that she had only seen once before was right there. We were beyond excited.

From week to week, I was amazed by how fast the landscape changed, how quickly the flowers arrived, and just as quickly left. And though we never traveled more than six miles, the absolute difference in blooms from road to road was striking. There might be twinleaf on Ford Lane for a week. Then two weeks later, we would find them again on Long Branch Road. In the first few weeks, bluebells covered Cane Run Road, but we rarely saw them anywhere else.

There were so many new flowers on one of our final outings that we were out much longer than usual. On Ford Lane, we saw waterleaf, whitetop, false Solomon's seal, Gray's sedge, lyre leaf sage, common cinquefoil,

STONECROP



TRILLIUM



TWIN LEAF



VETCH



WHITE TROUT LILY



WILD GERANIUM



WILD STRAWBERRY



YELLOW TROUT LILY

Carolina vetch, daisy, yarrow, purple rocket, and fire pink. For weeks, Granny talked about where the fire pink would bloom, so when I spotted one, I yelled, “there it is!” unable to hold back my excitement. While on Cane Run Road, we saw water hyacinth, larkspur, wild strawberry, and columbine. We saw hawksbeard, stonecrop, hairy buttercup, yellow clover, golden Alexander, red clover, spiderwort, Miami mist, and shooting stars on Long Branch Road. Granny loves the shooting stars because they’re “startling” and “just so complicated.” They are the type of wildflowers that leave you in awe and beg you to ask the question, “How did that even happen?”

Together, Granny and I searched for and named the wildflowers. Granny believes that knowing the names means you are more apt to see them next time. So now, as fall begins, I will carry them with me through winter until next spring when I see them again. I hope you can do the same. Please take these wildflowers with you through winter; remember their strength, beauty, and constancy. Then next spring, be conscious of their return and share them with the ones you love.

—TANYA SMITH

BOOKS AND JOURNALS
USED DURING WILDFLOWER
SEARCHES.





PROGRAM UPDATES

REGGIE AND CARRIE BROWN TAKE A SELFIE WITH THEIR COWS.

OUR HOME PLACE MEAT FEATURED FARMER

INTERVIEW BY: BETH DOUGLAS,
Marketing Manager, Our Home Place Meat

REGGIE AND CARRIE BROWN are Founding Farmers in the Our Home Place Meat program here at The Berry Center. They farm with Paul and Brenda, Reggie's parents. The Brown's farm is about 320 acres in Turners Station, Henry County, Kentucky. While Paul and Brenda are members, Reggie is recognized as the lead farmer of the operation. Reggie has farmed his entire life, and his wife, Carrie, happily joined the operation three years ago. To help offset the cost of farming, Reggie has been working at Nucor Steel in Ghent, Kentucky, for the past 26 years. In his spare time (besides farming), he volunteers on the Our Home Place Meat New Farmer Recruitment Committee. Carrie not only keeps Reggie and the farming operation organized, but she also spends a good portion of her time tending to their 77 cattle.



PAUL BROWN (L) AND HIS SON REGGIE (R) ARE FIFTH AND SIXTH GENERATION HENRY COUNTY FARMERS. PHOTO: CARRIE BROWN



BOOP! PHOTO: REGGIE BROWN



REGGIE BROWN WITH A CHRISTMAS CALF. PHOTO: CARRIE BROWN

Tell us about your family's farming history.

I am the 6th generation of my family that has been on the place where I live now. My great-great-great-granddad settled in here, and the graveyards on the farm are from the 1700s. For a long time, we were mainly raising tobacco. Cattle were secondary income. Tobacco went away in 2004 and since then, it has been all cattle.

What does your farming operation look like now?

Right now, we run about 80 cows. We own about 210 acres and lease another 110. We have three bulls and each year, we try to keep 7-10 heifers to build up the herd.

If money were not an issue, what would your farming operation look like?

I would have enough cattle to not have to work out in public. I would buy everything (all of the land) around us, if possible, and try to set up the next generation so they can have a chance to keep farming. I would run cattle on all of it—triple, maybe even quadruple the number of cattle we have.

What does it mean to you to be an Our Home Place Meat Farmer?

I feel like I've got a voice, and I feel like I'm accomplishing something. It's going to a good cause and as far as the program itself, financially, it's been a blessing. It allows us to do things that I would've had to work a long time to do.

PROGRAM NEWS

WE'VE BLINKED and it is already Fall! Where has 2021 gone? I feel like we are all still trying to unpack everything that happened in 2020 and yet, the world has kept spinning. Despite the feeling that we have somehow missed a significant amount of time, Our Home Place Meat has continued to work hard for our farmers and our communities. By the time the year ends, Our Home Place Meat will have put \$245,000 back into our community through dollars earned by our farmers and processor, Trackside Butcher Shoppe. The most important (and amazing!) news is that we intend to add at least two additional farmers to our group of farmers for 2022. This is an important step taking us closer to our dream of becoming a livestock cooperative.

We have spent this year focusing on regaining our restaurant customer base, but with many restaurants still recovering from the pandemic, we have seen only a slight increase in sales. No worries, though, we are still making our Rose Veal available to anyone and everyone who wants it. Rose Veal is available to restaurant chefs through the distributor What Chefs Want, and home chefs may still buy online at www.ourhomeplacemeat.com or at Our Home Place Market at 45 S Main St, New Castle, Kentucky. You don't have to be a chef to buy our meat, though—you just need the desire to eat simple, yet delicious and healthy food.

Graciously, Wendell and Tanya Berry are once again offering a matching gift opportunity of \$10,000 to Our Home Place Meat so that we can feed our neighbors. We intend to continue our work with established organizations that know best how to distribute food. This includes the Henry County Help Center, Change Today Change Tomorrow of West Louisville, Food Chain Lexington, and many more. We are applying for matching grant funds to extend this further, but would also appreciate your support. When you renew, join, or give a Berry Center Membership, your contribution will be matched up to \$10,000 by the Berry Family! Donations can be

made at www.berrycenter.org/donate. Our Home Place Meat is dedicated to making sure healthy and nutritious Rose Veal is available to our most vulnerable communities.

As a thank you to those who continue to support us on this endeavor, Our Home Place Meat is offering all customers a 15% coupon for online purchases. Just enter the code THANKYOU2021 at checkout. Our program is doing amazing things and we want to continue. We do that best with your support so *THANK YOU!*

—BETH DOUGLAS
Marketing Manager, Our Home Place Meat

THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE



STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND FRIENDS OF THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE CANOE THE ELKHORN CREEK IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY ON THEIR FIRST DAY OF THE 2021 SEMESTER.

THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE (WBFP) welcomed the second full cohort with Orientation Days at the various Henry County campus locations: The Berry Center Farm, Hope Hill Farmstead, the Heritage Building, The Berry Center, and TBC Bookstore. 12 students—coming to us from various parts of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Connecticut, Texas, Colorado, and California—launched the academic year on August 23 with a course in “Whole Farm Thinking.” They canoed through the Kentucky River watershed, worked with Our Home Place Meat farmers, explored woodlands with foresters, walked pastures and native grasslands, and met countless neighbors. They read David Kline’s farming day book, Crystal Wilkinson’s “O Tobacco,” Wendell Berry’s poetry, and farm planning guides. All this to begin engaging the question: What will it take for a farmer to afford to farm well?

SLOW COOKER ROSE VEAL CHUCK ROAST TACOS

IT'S GETTING TO that busy time of year again where the kids are back in school and it seems like there is something happening every night of the week. If you're like me, you're already tired of rotating the same meals and desperately trying to find something new to fix, but it needs to be delicious and quick. There's a lot to be said for the classic pot roast, but here's an update to a classic. Try using your Rose Veal Chuck Roast to make tacos! This meal is a perfect solution to your Tuesday Night Fiesta!

—Beth Douglas, OHPM Marketing and Communications Manager

INGREDIENTS

- 2–3 lb. Rose Veal chuck roast
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 teaspoon cayenne
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup beef broth
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 jalapeno pepper, diced
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Season the beef with salt and pepper to taste then sear all sides over medium high heat in some oil until browned, about 2 minutes per side
2. Remove beef and set aside
3. Combine cayenne, cumin, paprika and garlic with the beef broth
4. Add tomato paste, jalapeno and lime juice and stir to mix
5. Transfer beef to a slow cooker and toss in diced onions
6. Pour the beef broth mixture over the meat
7. Cook on low for 6–8 hours or high for 3–4 hours
8. Remove the bone and shred beef with two forks and toss to coat with the juices
9. Dish and serve hot with toppings

Suggested toppings: Lettuce, cheese, beans, rice, tomatoes, onions, cilantro, lime, guacamole, salsa, sour cream or hot sauce

Recipe Credit: thecookingjar.com/slow-cooker-shredded-beef-tacos/

THE AGRARIAN CULTURE CENTER AND BOOKSTORE

A GOOD PLACE TO START

Announcing The Agrarian Literary League Pick for 2021

FOR A DECADE The Berry Center has been putting Wendell Berry's writing to work through our programs that support strong rural economies, education that teaches homecoming, and a culture of shared work and membership. Reflecting on my part in this work over the past six years I think first about the many good people who have visited the Bookstore at The Berry Center, coming from their home places across the country. These guests have been generous with me and honest about their concerns that are not too different from my own, and in this way I have learned about places I may never have the privilege to visit in person. There is often a pattern to these conversations, and many times I am asked the question, "Where should I start in my reading?" My answer to the question of where to begin with Wendell's fiction has always been *Fidelity: Five Stories*. Here is the Port William membership, the Coulters and Catletts, Rowenberrys, Penns, and Branches and their stories spanning generations. Here is the vision of our rural home as it once was and the illustration of what all of us here at the Center know is possible once again.

Because of its importance to our work, and in celebration of The Berry Center's 10th anniversary, *Fidelity: Five Stories* is our choice for the 2021/22 Agrarian Literary League (ALL). You are invited to read along with us. If you are a resident of Henry County, free copies of *Fidelity* are available from The Bookstore at the The Berry Center, or delivery can be arranged by contacting bookstore@berrycenter.org. If you are a distant neighbor and would like to support ALL, please visit berrycenterbookstore@berrycenter.com and choose BUY ONE GIVE ONE as your order option. Your purchase will make a copy of *Fidelity* available for a local member.

—VIRGINIA BERRY AGUILAR
Director of Agrarian Culture Center & Bookstore



THE ARCHIVE OF THE BERRY CENTER

HERE ARE SOME TITLES new to the Tanya Amyx Berry Agrarian Library this month.

The Thousand Year Flood: The Ohio, Mississippi Disaster of 1937 — David Welky.

In 1937 the Ohio and Mississippi rivers flooded to record heights. The disaster cost hundreds of lives, and half a billion dollars.

Wrenched from the Land: Activists Inspired by Edward Abbey — M. L. Lincoln, Ed.

Abundant Earth: Toward an Ecological Civilization — Eileen Crist.

Examines the loss of biodiversity and lays out the causes of this destruction.

Hope is an Imperative — Essays by David Orr.
One of the leaders of the environmental movement champions the cause of ecological literacy in higher education.

The Beekeepers Bible: Bees, Honey Recipes and Other Home Uses — Sharon Sweeney-Lynch.
A beautiful book and the ultimate guide to the essentials of beekeeping.

Dirt to Soil — Gabe Brown

The author is a proponent of reintegrating livestock and crops on farms and ranches.

Late Harvest: Rural American Writing

— Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Carolyn Chute, Annie Dillard, William Gass, Garrison Keillor, Bobbie Ann Mason, Wallace Stegner.
David R. Pichaske, Ed.

The Birds of Opulence — Crystal Wilkinson.

A book by Kentuckian Crystal Wilkinson about growing up amidst a beloved membership in the southern black township where they live.

The Practice of the Wild: Essays by Gary Snyder

Spit in the Ocean: All About Kesey

— Ed McClanahan, ed. with contributions by Larry McMurtry, Robert Stone, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolfe.

If you're a new patron of the library, stop by and fill out a registration form. Students, you're welcome to visit the library at The Berry Center any time!

—MICHELE GUTHRIE

Archivist, The Archive of The Berry Center



To Me He Was Just Dad: Stories of Growing Up With Famous Fathers — Joshua David Stein.
Stories of growing up as sons and daughters of well-known people.

Shantyboat and Shantyboat Journal

— Harlan Hubbard. Books by Harlan Hubbard, the subject of Wendell Berry's 1989 Blazer Lectures at the University of Kentucky and his book, *Harlan Hubbard: Life and Work*.

Window Poems

20. In the early morning dark
he dreamed of the spring woodsflowers
standing in the ground,
dark yet under the leaves and under
the bare cold branches.
But in his dream he knew their way
was prepared, and in their time
they would rise up joyful.
And though he had dreamed earlier
of strife, his sleep became peaceful.
He said: If we, who have killed
our brothers and hated ourselves,
are made in the image of God,
then surely the bloodroot,
wild phlox, trillium and mayapple
are more truly made
in God's image, for they have desired
to be no more than they are,
and they have spared each other.
Their future
is undiminished by their past.
Let me, he said in his dream,
become always less a soldier
and more a man,
for what is unopened in the ground
is pledged to peace.
When he woke and went out
a flock of wild ducks that had fed
on the river while he slept
flew off in fear of him.
And he walked, manly, into the new day.
He came to his window
where he sat and looked out,
the earth before him, blessed
by his dream of peace,
bad history behind him.

WENDELL BERRY—*Window Poems*, Counterpoint, 1985



HOW EXCITING TO ANNOUNCE that my mother's book has won an award. My daughter Virginia Berry Aguilar found a series of photographs that my mother took of an annual hog killing in the winter of 1979 while looking through some boxes of old photographs at my parent's house. She and her husband Ben Aguilar saw the importance of the photographs not to mention their quality. Ben used the photographs for his thesis in graduate school. Leaving some steps out and thanks to Fireside Industries, and imprint of University Press of Kentucky and Hindman Settlement School, the result is *For the*

Hog Killing 1979. The book is not nostalgia. It is a celebration of what was and what could be again. How wonderful then to couple the announcement of the award with an article by John Inscore Essick about a hog killing 40 years later of my mother's beloved church community engaged in a hog killing. —MARY BERRY

REMEMBERING FROM TABLE TO GROUND

IT WAS A Wednesday evening. 2019. October 16th. Our church community gathered, as was its monthly habit, to share a meal together. On that evening, the main course was pork and vegetables which had been smoking together for hours on the church grounds. I watched as young and old alike made their way to the tray to study, probe, pick and choose which cuts of pork they wanted to eat. Some gravitated toward the neck and shoulders. Others settled on the loin and ribs. The ham and shanks were popular, too. Many could not settle on one cut, so they took some of each. I remember that table of abundance well.

Several people present had been to a "Pig pickin'" or "Pig roast" before, but many had not attended a gathering which involves the barbecuing of an entire pig. Our experiences with tenderloin or chops usually involved grabbing a plastic-wrapped polystyrene foam tray from the back wall of the nearest grocery store. But on that night around that table, the (hi)story of our eating was much easier to see and touch. I will never forget watching children and adults curiously study the anatomy of the whole piglet prepared for them. The snout was there. The ears. The skin. All of it drawing all of us. We ate with a curiosity made possible by the perfect distance between farm and table. Knowledgeable and affectionate eating increased with every "What is that called?" and "Can I try some of that?". I remember those questions as prayers.

More than twelve hours earlier, while it was still dark, some of us met at the church to begin the process of slow cooking a piglet born and raised just a few miles away. Spices were applied before a large sewing needle was used to stitch the incision back together, enclosing potatoes, onions, squash, and garlic where vital organs had once been. We placed the piglet in the smoker and trusted that time and heat would conspire with us. It took more than an hour of desperate attempts (and not a few text messages before 5:00 am) before we succeeded in making a fire that would feed us. I nervously checked that smoker over and over throughout the day. I remember those twelve hours of waiting.

Three days prior, on Sunday evening, we left a small pig hanging in a cooler on the only farm it had ever known. There was relief that it was dressed for cooking. There was, to be sure, second guessing of choices and small regrets for mistakes made. Had we done what was necessary well enough? Yet there it waited, a refrigerated testimony to work that must wait once all the decisions, plans, and labors have been completed. I remember hoping it would be enough.

Earlier that Sunday afternoon my family joined four other families to do what our neighbor has described as the "traditional neighborly work of killing a hog and preparing it for food" (*For the Hog Killing, 1979, 1*). Washing the carcass was straightforward enough



FAMILY AND FRIENDS LOOKING ON AS BLOOD IS COLLECTED IN A METAL BOWL. VALLEY SPIRIT FARM, 2019.

PHOTO: ABIGAIL SCOTT-MONROE.

as our hands became increasingly comfortable handling something that had just taken its last breath while we all watched. Our scraping of the skin did not go smoothly. Did we leave the carcass in the water too long? Was the water hot enough? Too hot? Gutting the animal went more smoothly—and cautiously. Gutting a deer is not exactly like gutting a pig, but the work is similar enough that a skillful and careful hand can translate adequately. We managed, slowly, with everyone doing their part to learn the distance from ground to table. Younger hands. Older hands. Weak hands. Strong hands. Such work was neither boring nor extraordinary. It was, rather, altogether ordinary. I remember feeling like I was working in communion with all those in the past, present, and future who engage in old-growth work like this.

There was not an expert among us when we began. The same was true when we finished. Together we had learned and studied enough to know that we could do this work imperfectly. The farmer knew best how to keep the piglets calm as strangers encroached

upon their territory, for he had spent hours caring for them and the ground they shared. Another one of us knew how to deliver a bullet in such a way that the young pig would not know what happened. Others of us were ready with knife and bowl to collect the life as it spilled forth. I remember the ground where it all began.

Almost exactly forty years before all this, Tanya Amyx Berry gracefully captured on photographic film a previous generation engaged in hog killing work that now looks familiar to me. Much that should have been committed to memory has been forgotten since 1979, and I have contributed to that forgetfulness. The distance between our tables and the ground has certainly increased at an alarming rate, and I have contributed to that distance. I also know that it has been—and can be—otherwise. I am trying to remember the way back from my table to the ground beneath my feet.

—JOHN INSCORE ESSICK, *Co-Pastor of Port Royal Baptist Church and Director of the Rural Ministry Program at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky*



BEYOND THE BERRY CENTER

FOOD GROWS WHERE WATER FLOWS BILLBOARD ON I-5 IN CALIFORNIA. PHOTO: STEVEN DAMRON.

WHERE THE RAIN FALLS

AS I WRITE THIS, news of historically novel wildfires in the northwestern United States and historically novel drought in the southwestern United States is being pushed off the front pages by news of historically novel rain on the Greenland ice sheet, so novel in fact that scientists researching the land-mass hadn't bothered to put up a rain gauge to be able to measure it. None of this is encouraging news, particularly when paired with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change climate report released earlier this month, but the irony of rain where you don't need it is not lost on us here in Henry County where (much like all the rest of 'farm country' I would expect) the fickle nature of summer precipitation is a topic of conversation that will never get old. Our neighbors to the south in Humphreys County, Tennessee are assuredly less entertained by that conversation than we are in this moment, as I expect are our friends a little east of here who went through their own record flooding events this year. Hundreds of people dead, hurt, or displaced. Whole towns wiped off the map. (*Author's Note:* In between final drafting and publication of this newsletter we

in the States have seen the landfall of Hurricane Ida, which has destroyed lives and homes all across the eastern half of this country. I am adding this news here rather than in the body of the text to better convey the frequency of these disasters.)

It seems obvious that a warming climate contributes to these changing weather patterns, and among the most striking and interesting to me of those rapidly vanishing headlines mentioned above were those like the following from the *New York Times*: 'Wracked by drought, California will cut water for many farmers.'; 'In a first, U.S. government declares shortage on the Colorado River, forcing water cuts in Arizona, Nevada and Mexico'; 'It's Some of America's Richest Farmland. But What Is It Without Water?'. That last one, particularly, seems to ask one simple question while eliding about a dozen thornier ones. The premise of this article is that, with recent cuts to California's historically complicated and unusually permissive water rights, farmers are having to adapt to a set of growing conditions that can no longer rely on the state-backed promise of sufficient irrigation. This is a particularly daunting adaptation to make given the other presumption in that head-



MIGRANT WORKERS HARVEST LETTUCE IN WATSONVILLE, CA. PHOTO: BOB NICHOLS, USDA

line, which is that this area (and generally speaking I will be referring to the Central Valley of California here, though the Colorado river valley is in similarly dire straits) is the richest farmland in the country for some other reason than that we have been dumping diverted snow melt, river, and groundwater onto it in vast excess of what would naturally be falling there for a hundred years now. The richness in question is not the fertility, health, or percentage of organic matter present in the soil, but rather the monetary value of the crops grown there, particularly the notoriously thirsty irrigated crops like almonds, rice, and even flood-irrigated pasture grasses and alfalfa for hay. For years now, even before these recently scheduled cuts, farmers in the Central Valley have been tearing up orchards and fallowing cropland. The luckier, or cannier, ones have been able to sell their senior water rights to desperate farmers further down the watershed for more than their crops would have brought in the first place.

One thing I am generally certain of is that the people interviewed by the *New York Times* are not the ones who will come out the worst from these cuts. Based on a cursory search, the four ‘farmers’ interviewed in one article are managing, between them, at the very

least 30,000–40,000 acres, a figure which is staggering to those of us who live where the average ‘family farm’ runs to less than 200. These types of ‘family-owned farms’ are complex corporate entities in their own rights, with extremely sophisticated accounting practices, in-house infrastructure for processing, and favorable contracts with industrial processors and retailers who are themselves becoming increasingly vertically integrated. They also have sizeable workforces subject to labor practices which are, to put it charitably, controversial. Mark Bittman quoted a Fresno writer named Mark Arax in a 2012 article (also in the *Times*) who told him “This land and its water have gone mostly to the proposition of making a few men very wealthy and consigning generations of others, especially farmworkers, to lives in the dust.” Indeed, a list compiled from the last census of California’s highest poverty rates reads like a whistle-stop tour of Highway 99, running from Bakersfield up to Visalia, Fresno, Merced, Stockton, through Sacramento up to Yuba City. We expect to see the few infamous centers of California’s urban poverty appearing as high as they do on the list, but Oakland (where I was born, in fact), Inglewood and East LA aren’t on the main artery of a 17 billion dollar annual



SPRINKLERS WATERING CROPS BELOW BARE HILLS IN 2008. PHOTO: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

agricultural economy either. If the money isn't going to the people tending the land, then where is it going? If the people cannot afford to live on the land, then where will they go? For many of the workers, home means Mexico, which is itself dealing with the dwindling watersheds in the American southwest as rivers tend not to care about which borders they cross, or even farther south towards a similarly warming and drying Central America.

Without water or labor, what does farming in the Central Valley, the undisputed colossus of American food production, look like after another 5 years of similar drought? We have seen this last year-and-a-half what even a small disturbance in the food supply chain produces when rippling through a consolidated and inflexible industrial economy. This continuing drought and the resulting production loss would be an alarming enough proposition wherever it happened, but the Central Valley occupies a unique position in the American food economy. We are talking about a quarter of all domestic food production, a figure which beggars the imagination. Big Farming will require of us increasingly Big Changes, not just from the farm corporations and industrial producers, but

society as a whole. The rivers which are diverted through desert croplands are the same ones which power the largest metro area in the nation. The aquifers that are being pumped dry for almond trees provide the drinking water for 60 million people. We are currently consigning ourselves to a future where the state with the 'richest farmland' on Earth has to choose: money, or life? Food, or water? We know this is no choice at all, and this reflects the bind that every agricultural community faces in an economy hostile to the agrarian values of stewardship and husbandry. Despite my intimations earlier, I'm not unsympathetic even to the biggest operations out west. The people who put a million almond trees in the desert are as trapped as the rest of us by a century of bad decisions for the sake of money. I suspect that the biggest of them will be retiring comfortably, but what about the rest of us? Can we afford, as a country, to fallow what needs to be fallowed, to tear up the means of our short-term gains for the sake of the next hundred years, or thousand? Can we afford to only farm where the rain falls?

—BEN AGUILAR
The Berry Center Director of Operations



LETTER FROM MARY BERRY

THE WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM STUDENTS GATHER FOR THEIR FIRST DAY OF WORK PROGRAM ON THE BERRY CENTER FARM IN TURNERS STATION, KENTUCKY.

DEAR FRIENDS,

MY MOTHER SAYS of my father that his principal talent as a writer has been his knack for repeating himself. I will never be the writer he is but I do have his knack for repeating myself and my forebears. I'm about to do it again.

I've said many times, in one way or another, that our work at The Berry Center is to put back together things that should never have been taken apart. To do this we must try to think of the health of everything: the land, the people who care for the land, the wild and domesticated animals, the birds and insects, the air, the water and so on. The only way this can be done responsibly is to limit one's scope to a home country. What has happened to rural America, rural Kentucky, and to Henry County Kentucky is surely

linked but the work to restore health to rural places must start with the ground under one's own feet. My father has written for 65 years about thinking about the whole problem. It's time that we follow his advice.

Maybe there has never been a more important time to think about conservation and preserving farmland. Certainly, with so few people farming and making a living, we need to be creative about getting young people on land. But there is a limit to what land trusts and land conservancies can do if we don't work toward an economy that will allow farmers who understand good land use and sustainable forestry to make a living. This is the only way to settle our country. This is the way the culture and art of good

“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



land use and the land itself will be passed from generation to generation. And although I have written about this many times, I haven’t said it plainly enough—this is the work of The Berry Center. To consider working landscapes—fields and forests—and the people who know how to work them. The people and the land never separated. Urban culture dominates our public conversation, however, we must remember that rural America is nearly all of our actual country. To supply the people we have got with the food and shelter that we need and to do this without destroying the source of what we have to have to survive will

take local work by people who know where they are. It will take local leadership and local accountability. Protest is important but at some point one must stop trying to get the leadership to do something and go to work where one is and with their neighbors. By doing so we figure out what we need done and then can tell our so-called leaders to do it.

Thank you for all you do in your places and for your continued interest in what we do at The Berry Center.

Sincerely,
MARY BERRY



THE BERRY CENTER FARM, TURNERS STATION, KENTUCKY.



WBFP STUDENTS HOUSING TOBACCO AT A LOCAL FARM.



BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

DEN, WENDELL, TANYA AND MARY BERRY, LANES LANDING FARM. PHOTO: BEN AGUILAR.

MY BROTHER

IT IS A JOKE between my brother Den and me that people away from Henry County think that I am an only child. Den refers to himself, in fact, as the brother to an only child. Now this has nothing to do with parental preference you can be sure. Only that Den sticks closer to home as good farmers do and I get around a bit. I do like a party!

Den is four years younger than I. When I turned fifty, I decided that he and I should switch ages and was so convincing that our father forgot who the eldest was for a while. Den drove me crazy when he was little although that says a good deal more about what kind of child I was than anything about him. He was as sweet a little boy as ever existed I think. I once apologized to him for being so hard on him when we were young and he said, “You were?” He had never noticed my efforts to improve him. Our mother, making an attempt to make me nicer to him, told me once, “You and Den are more closely related to each other than to anyone else.” I was shocked to hear this, I must have been about 12, and said it couldn’t be true. Well, I am so glad it is true.

Den is a lifelong passionate farmer. He has observed this county that we both love with the keen eye of

someone who understands good land use and cares deeply for the community that he has spent his life in. His own farm is the embodiment of what we hope for. It LOOKS healthy. It LOOKS like an artist lives there because, in fact, one does. A practitioner of the ART of farming. Den is also a great musician and woodworker. An artist all around.

Den’s role on TBC Board is to make sure that we understand that farming for a living is hard and that “the deck” is stacked against small farmers. Lest we get carried away with ourselves Den is there to bring us back down to the ground where we belong and want to be. Our fellow board member Maggie Keith, a farmer herself, says that it feels so good to talk about what is really going on with farmers at a board meeting. We can thank Den for a good deal of that.

My father has written about his close friendship with his brother John and what it meant to him to be allied with his brother in their advocacy for small farmers and their communities. I, too, am allied with my brother and it is one of the great blessings of my life.

I am most thankful to him for bringing his wonderful wife Billie into our family. And then his daughter Emily and son Marshall. He and Billie now have a beautiful granddaughter named Eleanor.

—MARY BERRY

ON GIFT-GIVING OCCASIONS during this long period of Covid isolation, I've looked for ways I can recognize family and friends and the causes they care about the most. My holiday gift last year for my brother and sister-in-law, Chris and Sandy Canon, was a membership in their names to The Berry Center. They live on a small farm in rural Washington County, Kentucky in a house that makes passive use of the sun's energy for heating and cooling. Our sister, Nancy, my husband, Andy, and I enjoy visiting there every summer to savor the beauty and calm of those Kentucky hills, wander their colorful flower and vegetable gardens and visit with their friends and the animals that are part of all those fun households.

While my brother, sister and I grew up in urban Memphis, we come from family with deep roots in north Mississippi farming. It wasn't long after Chris and Sandy moved to Lexington in the mid-80s that he discovered the writings of Wendell Berry and enthusiastically recommended those books to me. Berry's stories described the blessings and complexities of agrarian life at about the time our own father was growing up and gave us greater insight into the communities that formed him. Imagine our pride and delight when Sandy—who for three decades worked passionately with several organizations that support the people of Kentucky—joined the staff of the Berry Center several years ago.

Since then, I've been fascinated to learn about the projects the Berry Center has initiated—in particular Our Home Place Meat and the Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College. These programs offer your local farmers a standard for how to raise cattle ethically and then sell their meat in regional markets at prices that are fair for both the seller and buyer . . . and at the same time provide instruction and encouragement for a new generation of young people who hope to follow in those farmers' footsteps. I look forward to watching as other groups across our nation are inspired by their models to try similar programs in their own communities.

I really do enjoy reading their newsletters. It's like sitting down with a very interesting group of people to discuss big ideas.

—KATE DIXON, Berry Center Member
Georgetown, Tennessee



KATE CANON DIXON AND ANDY POUNCEY

Join Kate and Andy by giving the gift of membership this holiday season!

In addition to joining or renewing your membership you can give the gift of a Berry Center Membership to a loved one as a gift for any occasion.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Members will receive The Berry Center Annual Journal, seasonal newsletters, and 10% off at The Bookstore at The Berry Center.
- Port William Circle Members contributing \$1000 or more annually will receive a signed broadside by Wendell Berry, and special offers at The Bookstore at The Berry Center and Our Home Place Meat.

To give a membership visit www.berrycenter.org, email Loren Carlson at lorencarlson@berrycenter.org, or call 502-845-9200. *Gift deadline is December 13, 2021. Gift memberships will be delivered in a special Berry Center holiday card mailed out December 17, 2021.*

FALL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- 9/25 Agrarian Literary League Fall Festival (postponed)
- 11/10 Agrarian Culture Center Kentucky Arts & Letters Day (virtual & in-person events TBD)
- 12/16 Berry Center Archive Virtual Lecture Series IV



"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,"

says Burley Coulter in a story from
The Wild Birds by Wendell Berry.



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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