



THE BERRY CENTER

News from THE BERRY CENTER

Spring 2023

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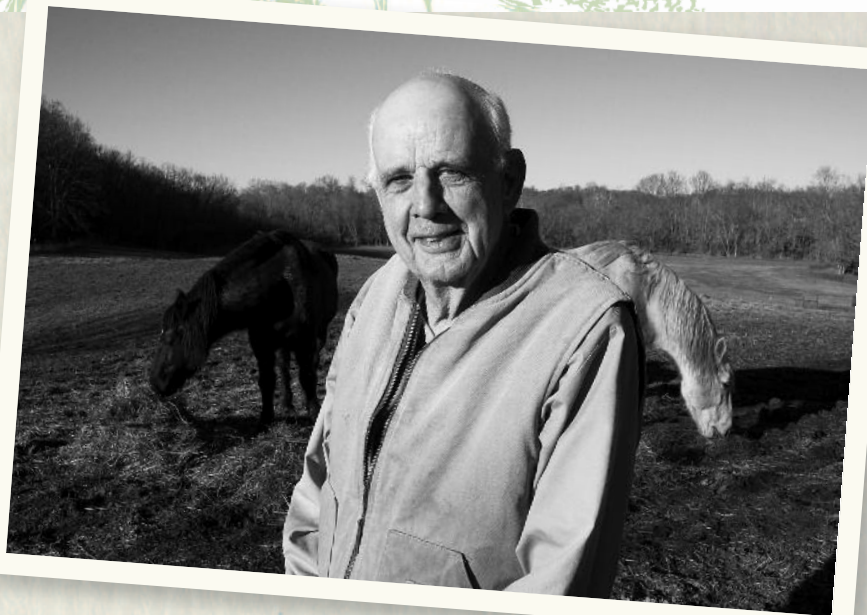
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GUY MENDES, 2012

Wendell Berry, Henry County, Kentucky

WENDELL BERRY: A LETTER TO THE EDITOR, THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

INTRODUCTION BY MARY BERRY

I AM GLAD TO SHARE with our membership a letter that my father wrote to *The New York Review of Books* in response to an article called “Making the Senate Work for Democrats” and a review of two books about the state of agriculture in America called “Grim Reapers.” The letter speaks for itself so I will add only that the “younger people” that he refers to who might show people around Henry County to see “what has happened here” includes my not so young self and my young indeed colleagues at The Berry Center.

The history of agriculture in Kentucky has not received the attention that it deserves. Our country’s farm population and the health of its farmland has been in decline for the last half century or more. The overproduction of annual row crops which has been encouraged by the official voices of agriculture is largely to blame. Kentucky’s history has the story of The Burley Tobacco Program which once and for a while protected small and midsized farmers thereby protecting the rural people and the land. The Program ended in 2004 which gives us almost twenty years to see what happens to the rural culture when an agricultural



economy that protects the land and the people is removed. We have used the Program as a model for Our Home Place Meat.

The archivist at The Berry Center, Michele Guthrie, has written beautifully in this newsletter about my grandfather John Berry, Sr.'s work with The Burley Tobacco Program. His life of service to his place and his people gives us a vision of what we are working for and how that work might be done.

I join my father and my grandfather in their invitation to come and see what has happened here in order to better understand what might be done to restore health to rural places thereby making the health of us all possible.

★ ★ ★

Early, 2023

To the Editor, The New York Review of Books
(letters@nybooks.com)

FOR ME, A LIFELONG RURAL AMERICAN, reading Alexander Burns's article, "Making the Senate Work for Democrats" (January 19, 2023) is an experience both odd and familiar. The experience was odd because the article appeared in The New York Review of Books, to which I am a longtime subscriber even though its editorial point of view and that of its writers is exclusively urban and academic. As its reader, I am an outsider looking in. The experience is familiar because Alexander Burns, like other writers for that magazine, has never looked at or imagined our country from a country person's point of view.

I live in Henry County, Kentucky, which I can remember as a part of a thriving agricultural region with many small family-run farms and flourishing local economies. Now, as in every place I know in rural America, the small towns here are dead or dying, much of the farmland (long priced above the reach of farmers) is consigned to toxic, continuously cropped large acreages of corn and soy beans; communities and families are breaking up. The education system prepares our young people to leave, and they are leaving. Other problems are addiction, depression, bad health, poverty, and the boredom with rural life that is induced and expected. At present we are suffering a solar panel land rush and a Bourbon boom land rush, which further increase land prices, go after the best farmland, and turn neighbor against neighbor.

I believe I have given a fair representation of the plight of rural America, a land of worsening problems that it did not cause and cannot solve, from which urban America derives its food, clothing, and shelter, plus "raw materials." For these necessary things rural America receives prices set in urban America. For the manufactured goods returned to it, rural America pays prices set in urban America.

This rural America Mr. Burns treats as an enemy country, "rural and white," inhabited by voters for Trump who are "animated most intensely by feelings of racial resentment or male self-pity," and by "working-class voters who feel victimized by a distant and dysfunctional government, by wealthy elites, by nefarious foreign regimes, and all-powerful multinational corporations." Mr. Burns is a political expert, who writes from a posture of authority, but his authority comes from no close acquaintance with rural places or with Trump voters or with people of the working class. He identifies only two reasons rural people might have had for voting for Trump, without asking, for instance, why they might have voted against Clinton or Biden. And he says that working-class voters "feel" victimized, apparently without considering that they may "feel" so because they know so. He might have added that many of them know also that they are disregarded or disdained by another set of elites who think them ignorant because they have not been to college. This is a prejudice, resting upon a cruel and extremely destructive falsehood of the same kind as white supremacy. To be fair, or at least more complete, Mr. Burns might have added to his collection of deplorables the rural voters who vote for Democrats only because the Democrats are not Republicans.

Mr. Burns objects to such people partly because many of them live in states sparsely populated that yet have two senators. He thinks that this is extremely unfair to Democrats. He blames "a constitutional order that truly is rigged against them." This is an extreme statement that seems to come from an extremely simple mind. Mr. Burns does not ask how his view might be changed if the voters in those states were mostly Democrats. And he has not the ability to imagine himself as a resident of one of those states if it were represented in Washington by a tiny delegation in the House and no senator.

Because I have watched for half a century and more the decline of my own community and others like it everywhere in rural America, along with the increasing ecological and cultural damages of industrial agriculture, I have made a practice of reading newspaper and magazine articles by Democratic or leftward experts of politics and economics, hoping that I would see an acknowledgement, first of the economic importance of the natural world, and then of the importance of the land-use economies of agriculture, forestry, and mining, by which the goods of the natural world are made available for human use. I have not made a “survey,” but I have read enough to know that Alexander Burns’s article is conventional. Like his fellow experts, he appears to assume the inexhaustibility of the non-human world, and likewise the forever availability of the rural and working-class humans who do, well or poorly, the fundamental work of every economy. Like most of his fellow experts, he consents to and takes for granted the corporate destruction of the land and the human communities of rural America.

What then is Mr. Burns’s program for the success of his party? He mentions first “a revolution in the American energy sector” and building “colossal semiconductor plants across the country.” Democrats, he says, should make those goals “the core of their party’s political identity.” He mentions also that Democrats need to deal with the climate crisis and Chinese imperialism, to defend “abortion rights,” and to support “decriminalizing marijuana, reining in big tech companies, confronting the OPEC oil cartel and the Saudi regime,” and guaranteeing “access to contraception, fertility treatments, and abortifacient drugs.”

Questions of the merit or political efficacy of Mr. Burns’s program are not my present concern. I want only to notice that it addresses no rural problem. There is no interest in remedies for the bad ecological and human effects of mining, or in a farm bill that would make agriculture less destructive of land and people, or in ways to preserve the ecological integrity of our forests, or in ways to prevent the corporate destruction of the local economies necessary to support local communities—to name only a few rural needs.

My impression is that the writers of the articles I have read have never ventured into rural America to ask in good faith what the problems are and what

might be the remedies. And so I have made a sort of practice also of inviting writers and editors to come here where I live to allow me (and some younger people) to show them what we are up against. So far, nobody has showed up.

As if to make up for its long neglect of the plight of American farmland and farmers, The New York Review of Books published in its next issue (February 9, 2023) “Grim Reapers” by Ian Frazier, a review of two books that corroborate my concern. In general, Mr. Frazier appears to take seriously the two authors’ understanding of the problems—among others, the government’s deliberate eradication of the “midsize farm”—and their warnings. But at the end of his review he undercuts his own seriousness and authority by these sentences:

I think that for midsize farms to avoid extinction and come back—and save us—they can’t just be the sensible solution that they are. They need to have something crazy-American about them, some kind of “gee whiz!” high-tech wonders that are environmentally unharmful and designed for them alone. In an age when American science can bounce a rocket off an asteroid 6.8 million miles away, how hard would it be?

There is no reason or excuse for these remarks, which rest upon a set of falsehoods that have blinded the American people and their government to the destruction of their land. The space program is not the highest human accomplishment. All problems cannot be solved by science and technology. Good farmers are not mindless drudges who can be easily replicated from the “labor pool” or the Class of 2023.

The truth is that when this nation chose to eliminate four million farmers (with their families, hired help, buildings, and boundaries) on the advice of the colleges of agriculture, the agricultural bureaucracy, and the agribusiness corporations, it committed a sort of cultural genocide. It destroyed, that is, a necessary mosaic of local agrarian cultures, which made farmers of farmers’ children by teaching them how to farm in their native places. Imperfect as it often was, this was an asset of immeasurable economic worth, easily wiped out, unimaginably difficult to restore. I don’t believe that the scientists of outer space could define the problem, let alone solve it.

PROGRAM UPDATES

THE AGRARIAN CULTURE CENTER AND BOOKSTORE



A peek at a section of our children's book collection on the second floor of the Bookstore at The Berry Center, where child-sized displays invite and encourage young readers with beautiful picture books, puppets, and fascinating things to do.

IF YOU HAVE EVER VISITED The Bookstore at The Berry Center and found me working behind the counter I'm sure that, in the course of our conversation, we discussed children's books. If you have never visited you may not know that the second floor of this old cabin is dedicated to children's books. I encourage everyone who comes in to "head up there and take a peek" whether they currently have children to shop for or not. Once upstairs guests find rows of shelves with front facing books so that the covers can be seen, all at child height so that little hands are able to pick up and flip through pages. A worn leather couch and some comfortable chairs are there to entice you to curl up and read. Two baskets full of wooden blocks (donated by a student in the Wendell Berry Farming Program) are

waiting to be played with. It's a highlight of this work to listen to families reading and laughing together just above my head.

And the result of going up to "take a peek" at the second floor is that the visitors always come back down the stairs with a smile and usually a story about books that they loved when they were young. This is an excellent way to get to know someone better.

Our children's book collection here at The Bookstore is curated through an agrarian lens, beginning first with the books I loved and that were read to me by my mother and grandparents. And then, in the last three years, there is the lens of my own experience as a mother, raising my daughter here in Henry County and asking the following questions about the books that I bring home:

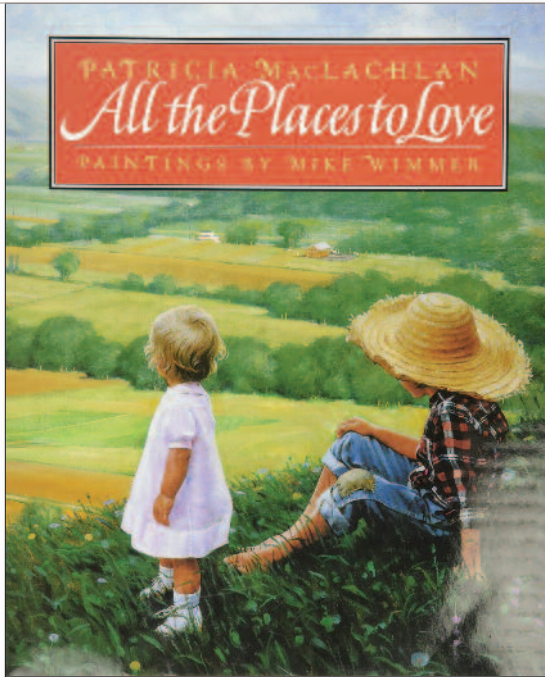
"What do I want my daughter to know? What do I want her to notice and appreciate? How does this help her know her place better? Will this make her laugh or smile?" and, of course, "How many times can I possibly read this?"

It feels like a near impossible task to narrow down our collection of hundreds to just a few recommendations, but here is my best effort; a few that we love most at this moment and that have us looking forward to the spring. Until you can join us in person here in New Castle, I hope you'll visit a few of these titles on our website at

www.berrycenterbookstore.com.

—VIRGINIA BERRY AGUILAR
Director, Agrarian Culture Center and Bookstore

PHOTO : BEN AGUILAR



All the Places to Love

by Patricia MacLachlan with illustrations by Mike Wimmer
Ages 2+ Hardcover \$17.99

Within the sanctuary of a loving family, baby Eli is born and, as he grows, learns to cherish the people and places around him, eventually passing on what he has discovered to his new baby sister, Sylvie: “All the places to love are here . . . no matter where you may live.”

The Secret Signs of Nature: How to Uncover Hidden Clues in the Sky, Water, Plants, Animals, and Weather

by Craig Caudill & Carrie Shryock
Ages 4+ Hardcover \$22.99

Learn how to navigate through any landscape—forests, deserts, even your own backyard—through observation of the world around you! Meet two young adventurers as they discover the ancient art of reading outdoor clues. Join them as they learn to read a full moon, decode the color of the ocean and forecast the weather, uncovering the secret signs of nature and a world of forgotten skills.



One Morning in Maine ROBERT McCLOSKEY



One Morning In Maine

by Robert McCloskey
Ages 3+ Paperback \$8.99

A classic! A picture of rural New England life that doesn't seem too far from my own experience of rural Kentucky life. This is one I can read again and again and again.

THE ARCHIVE AT THE BERRY CENTER

THE ARCHIVE AT THE BERRY CENTER collects, catalogues, and preserves the papers of John Berry, Sr., John Berry, Jr., and Wendell Berry, materials which give us a window into their lives and work, their habits of mind and the history of agrarianism here.

In *The Producer's Program: Fifty Golden Years & More* (Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, Inc., 1991) there is a reprint of John M. Berry, Sr.'s statement to a congressional committee in 1948 which opposed a Senate bill for a long-range program to address problems in agriculture. He begins by modestly stating that it is a great thing for someone involved at the grass roots to be able to address Congress and also states his appreciation for the support Congress had given farmers, some seven years after The Tobacco Program had become federal law. He goes on to suggest that because of the diverse problems of American agriculture, the legislation under consideration needs to be "flexible enough to provide alternative devices and measures to the general rule. Those problems that are exceptional—because of climatic, soil, cultural, or market conditions—will be so provided for by such alternative devices in order that those people—whose livelihoods depend upon the production and sale of the commodities employing such devices—will be assured the protection and preservations of their rights, notwithstanding the inapplicability of the general rule."

"[The senate bill] in its present form—insofar as it would affect Burley tobacco growers—apparently lacks the degree of flexibility that taking into account all of the factors of their case which, rightly, must be considered if [Burley tobacco growers] are to participate in the benefits of the overall solution the bill would achieve." This bill would "reduce domestic tobacco quotas drastically and mean that domestic requirements, in a short while, could not be met and the idea of abundant supplies and trends would be utterly ignored."

The bill was not well enough thought out to work fairly as a permanent, long-range program for farmers.

Mr. Berry always had farmers and their welfare on his mind; he had the ability to see the whole picture, always. The Tobacco Program, based on the foundation of production control (quotas) and price supports (parity pricing) which he wrote, supported, and shepherded in Congress was flexible enough to encompass trends of consumption, export demands as well as domestic; it planned for abundance, while avoiding surpluses.

"Burley tobacco farmers will, by the use of quotas regulate their own production behavior in keeping with the law of supply and demand. And continue their own affairs in order and at the same time, safeguard their government's interest under such loans..."

In this statement, *"The parity concept is the happiest and most fortunate thought that has visited the minds of statesmen of this country in generations. It accords with our way of life and gives real and tangible meaning to the philosophy of 'equal opportunity.' It is a consistent American way of striving for and approaching, parity of income without the use of direct subsidy payments by the government. It must be preserved and effectuated to the end that farmers may continue to enjoy the high standard of living and opportunity which they have had only a taste of,"* he is responding with admiration and appreciation for the legislators who understood farming and saw in the tobacco legislation something that would be flexible enough to address most problems. The tobacco program worked and worked well for farmers; it and they flourished for sixty and more years. John Berry, Jr. said that farmers did not necessarily get rich growing tobacco, but no one went broke. And there was an enduring culture of good farming and community which grew around its cultivation.

However, its detractors in Congress ultimately succeeded and The Tobacco Program ended, with no careful consideration or way forward for farmers after 2004. In the twenty years since the end of this agricultural program that even its detractors admitted worked, it's been forgotten by nearly everyone, particularly the U.S. agriculture department. And now we have what we might have expected, except it's far worse than we could have imagined. In a letter to



John M. Berry Sr., John M. Berry, Jr., and Wendell Berry at the Berry Family Home Place in Henry County, Kentucky

the editor reprinted in this newsletter Wendell Berry writes, “every place I know in rural America the small towns are dead or dying, much of the farmland is consigned to toxic continuously cropped large acreages of corn and soy beans, communities and families are breaking up. The communities are burdened with addiction, depression, bad health, poverty and the boredom with rural life that is induced and expected.”

In defense of the people and the land in rural places Wendell observes that recent writers speak with authority about rural areas they’ve never visited and people they’ve never spoken to. Their solutions do not address our real problems. Even as his father cautioned Congress in amending an agricultural program that was working, without understanding the ramifications of such changes, Wendell says that serious consideration of people, opinions, places, culture, and possible effects of actions, must be a part of addressing problems and arriving at solutions in rural America. We need to take the necessary time to devise and plan solutions, and not be pressed into rash or reckless ones. And Wendell, as did his father, persists in inviting journalists, legislators, and decision-makers to visit the places about which they write or

make decisions; visit and have conversations with the people there.

In another essay in *The Producer’s Program*, “The Roots of Co-op Stewardship,” author Randy Greene says, “[Mr. Berry, Sr.] exhibits other taproot traits long associated with the best of the Commonwealth’s collective, democratic, agrarian, and political character. So, too, would his sons, Wendell and John, Jr., each of whom contributed generational links to the model the father had fashioned. . . . ‘The branch’s fruit can be traced to the root of the plant.’”

“These sons assumed the Kentucky character that their father most clearly demonstrated through his work with the Burley Co-op. And that constitution would abide in the ongoing structure of the association itself.”

Our archive records that constitution in letters, speeches, and essays of three great agrarians. We are thus able to understand and learn from our past through the continuity in the work of true leaders in the Commonwealth.

—MICHELE GUTHRIE
Director, The Archive at The Berry Center



Farming isn't always black and white. Our Home Place Meat farmer Kylene Douglas is navigating the world of farming in the 21st century. Kentucky is known as a cow-calf operation state; The Berry Center and Our Home Place Meat are offering a market and parity prices to farmers to supply Kentucky with exceptional USDA Choice finished beef sourced and processed right here in Henry County. (Photo taken in Pleasureville, Kentucky by Kriech-Higdon Photography)

OUR HOME PLACE MEAT

LAST YEAR WAS a pivotal year for Our Home Place Meat. Our previous director, Sandy Canon, retired and in January, I was named director. It was the first full year of harvesting and marketing Berry Beef, our grain on grass finished beef. In 2022 our delicious Rose Veal was renamed and will now be known as Rose Beef. It's the same great, grass-fed meat, but without the name "veal" which often required an explanation and education. The first Rose Beef animals have been harvested and the product will be available this spring once we have worked through the inventory labeled as Rose Veal. Along with these changes we're planning a more user-friendly online store and, we're pleased to announce, more locations to purchase our meat locally.

These changes confirm The Berry Center's commitment to our farmers and our local economy. In 2022, Our Home Place Meat donated over \$60,000 of meat to affected communities devastated by disasters. We put an additional \$875,000 into the Henry County farm economy through the purchase of animals and processing.

The future is bright for [Our Home Place Meat](#). The program is moving toward becoming a self-sustaining cooperative that our farmers and customers can count on for years to come.

—BETH DOUGLAS
Director, Our Home Place Meat



February 19, 2023 Our Home Place Meat farmers and representatives of What Chefs Want and Trackside Butcher Shoppe met at The Berry Center's Heritage Building to discuss the previous year and the outlook for 2023.



The Douglas family—right to left: Kylene, Benjamin (11), Claire (9), Abigayle (9), and Beth.

FEATURED FARMER: KYLEN DOUGLAS

INTERVIEW BY BETH DOUGLAS
Director, Our Home Place Meat

Kylen Douglas is one of our Founding Farmers and is my personal favorite farmer (seeing as he is my husband). Kylen comes from a family of farmers and has had to have extreme patience over the last 16 years to make this mountain girl into a farm girl. We live on the farm he grew up on with our three children Benjamin (11), Abigayle (9), and Claire (9), making sure our children know where their food comes from and how to take care of the land.

Tell us about your family's farming history.

I come from a family of farmers. Everyone farms, even when they had jobs off the farms, they still farmed because it's what you do. Everyone used to have tobacco and cattle, but we're mostly all in cattle and hay now, maybe a few row crops.

What does your farming operation look like now?

We farm about 300 acres, mostly focusing on finishing beef cattle for the Berry Beef program and our conventional and certified organic hay operation. I'll put out some other crops or raise hogs to stay diversified, but those are our main outputs. I'm also one of two Ag Ed teachers at Franklin County High

School so I like to think I'm also helping shape the future of agriculture through educating my students.

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

I would expand my operation and become even more efficient, but I would like to think I'd try to help younger farmers get a start in agriculture.

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

Our Home Place Meat is allowing us to make a difference in our community and have an opportunity to keep our meat local. We get to see the changes The Berry Center is striving for.



The Douglasses participate in both Rose Beef and Berry Beef programs. They background cattle on pasture at their farm in Bethlehem, Kentucky to lower feed costs.

ROSE BEEF MEATBALLS WITH TOMATO BUTTER

Recipe compliments of Bob Perry, University of Kentucky Chef and Food Lab Coordinator



INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds ground Rose Beef*
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese grated
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ¼ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup parsley, finely chopped or Italian seasoning blend
- 1 teaspoon each salt & freshly ground pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Put ground meat (*can use a combo of lamb, beef and/or pork) in a large bowl. Add all other ingredients and mix by hand until combined. Do not overmix.

Form mixture into small 1" balls between your palms by rolling around. Set on a parchment-lined baking sheet.

Bake in the oven for 10 -12 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. Remove from the oven to cool.

If using right away, add to tomato butter or other sauce of your choice.
If freezing, cool to room temperature, pack in freezer bags.

TOMATO BUTTER

32 oz of crushed tomatoes

1 cup salted butter

Pour crushed tomatoes into a sauce pan. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 30 minutes. Puree tomatoes. Stir in 1 cup salted butter in ¼ cup increments, allowing butter to melt after each addition. Serve under the meatballs or pour over the meatballs.



RESTORATIVE FORESTRY—In the second half of the Fall 2022 Long Block, faculty member Rick Thomas led Wendell Berry Farming Program students in Restorative Forestry Class. Safety protocols and procedural overview happened each day before class for chainsaw use, for felling trees, for navigating the mules through the forest, and for personal and group awareness. This hands-on field / forest study began and ended at the barn: everyone was tasked with helping to prepare the draft animals and equipment, moving them to the forest location of the day; then, moving them from the forest location, cleaning and storing logging equipment, unhitching and grooming the mules, and restoring the draft animal harnesses.

Photo by Rick Thomas: L-R WBFP students David Beckman, Ivy Beach, Paul Borntraegerr, and Julia Farner by the load of red cedars they felled during class.

WENDELL BERRY FARMING PROGRAM OF STERLING COLLEGE

THE BERRY CENTER is adapting and redesigning the Wendell Berry Farming Program so more folks are farming well. We aim to increase people's access to our curriculum, which draws on the legacy and learning of the Berry family and the writers, farmers, researchers, and community members who inform that legacy.

Beginning in Fall 2023, this hands-on liberal arts curriculum will be offered through a combination of field days, workshops, and short courses for the community at its 200-acre farm and forest in Port Royal, Kentucky. The curriculum will also include season-long "low residency" classes, which blend distance education and in-person demonstrations. Participants may combine enrollment in multiple courses to earn a continuing education certificate. In all formats, students observe, practice, and apply

what they learn in Henry County to their own home places, communities, and farms.

To sign up for alerts about courses and registration information, please contact [Wendell Berry Farming Program](#) Director of Student Life and Operations Shannon Boyd at sboyd@sterlingcollege.edu.

—SHANNON BOYD

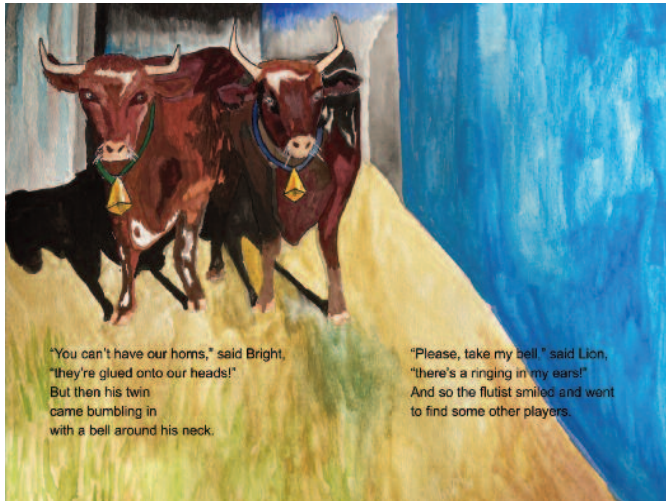
Director of Student Life and Operations

—DR. LEAH BAYENS Dean
Wendell Berry Farming Program

We look forward to a grand celebration of the 2022/23 students and their time with the Wendell Berry Farming Program at a commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 13, 2023.



Above: From *Please Think of Me*, by Ivy Beach; original artwork by Ivy Beach.

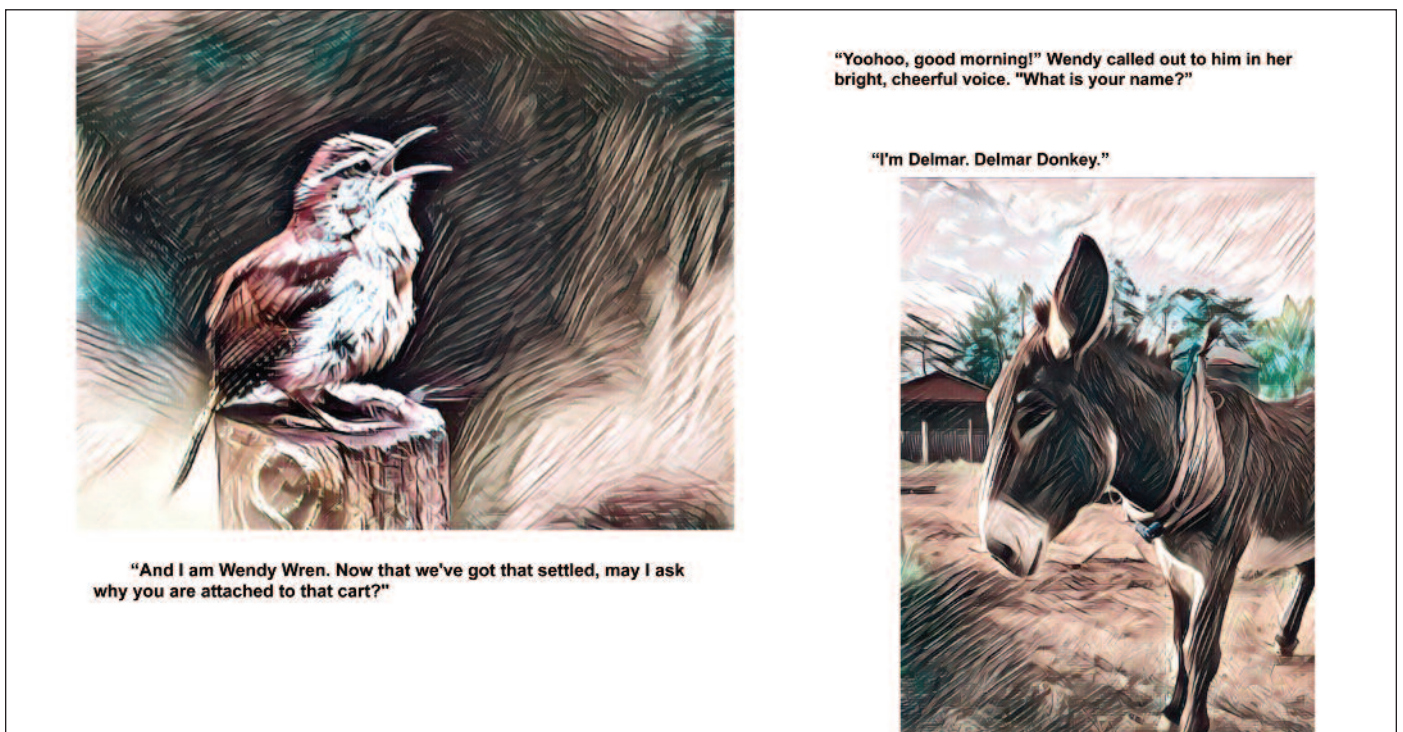


CHILDREN'S BOOK PROJECT FROM RURAL LITERATURE—In Fall 2022, Dr. Leah Bayens taught Literature of the Rural Experience. Students explored how the language of agricultural literature influences our understandings of and interactions within rural communities. In the course of the Long Block, they studied a sampling of texts by writers and artists whose works reflect and shape the thoughts, practices, and cultures of rural farming lives, including: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*; Bessie Head, *When Rain Clouds Gather*; Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*; and Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*.

The class culminated with a visit from Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson. Joining the students for this special class time: staff from The Berry Center, Wendell Berry, and community members Joe Wright, William Mumphrey, and Amber Inscore-Essick. After a rich discussion of Crystal's book, *The Birds of Opulence*, students presented children's books that they composed and illustrated. The books contained agrarian, ecological, or rural issues in some way, shape, or form.

Left: From *Hophornbeam*, by David Beckman, Julia Farner, and Sally Rother; original artwork by Julia Farner.

Below: From *Worried Wendy Wonders Why*, by Paul Borntraeger and Aaron Phillips; digital artwork by Paul Borntraeger.





CROP PRODUCTION—In late October, Dr. Ed Fredrickson's Intro to Crop Production Systems class visited Steve Smith's farm in Trimble County. After helping Steve tear down a short section of fence, they gathered outside to discuss Steve's experience with organic farming and community supported agriculture. They also talked with Steve about the culture of agriculture and what aspects of that culture we can bring forward into the future. The group finished their nearly day-long visit walking through Steve's seedings of native grasses.

Photo of students at Steve Smith's farm by Ed Fredrickson: L-R: Paul Borntraeger, Julia Farner, Sally Rother, Aaron Phillips, Steve Smith, David Beckman.

FENCE REMOVAL—WBFP students, faculty, and staff have spent the early spring blocks of Work Program taking out interior fencing on The Berry Center Farm. It is true that there are more efficient ways to remove fencing. Modern conveniences make it so. It's on the schedule for some others to come in at a later date and make quicker work of the second leg of it. Yet, the embodied work—the gloved-hand pulling it out of blackberry and multiflora rose brambles, the paying mind to hands that installed those lines of barbed wire years back, the walking the slope of the land and where it goes up to the ridge and down to Cane Run—this teaches.

"They walked the fence together. Andy showed Shad where it started and where it ended. Andy pointed to the old wood posts that were still sound, and to the ones that would have to be replaced. They took note of the considerable amount of brush and the several trees that would have to be removed before the old fence could be taken out and the new one built. They looked and Shad nodded at the half a dozen young oak and walnut trees that were not to be cut. Andy told Shad he wanted the bushes and the tree limbs laid in neat piles, butt ends together, handy to pick up. The old wires should be rolled up and the rolls put into piles." — WENDELL BERRY, "The Art of Loading Brush," from *How it Went*



Left photo by Leah Bayens: Ed Fredrickson and Julia Farner loading fence posts. Center photo by Shannon Boyd: L-R: Julia Farner, Paul Borntraeger, Leah Bayens, Shannon Boyd. Right photo by Leah Bayens: Sally Rother and Shannon Boyd rolling barbed wire.

Below

Above trees and rooftops
is the range of symbols:
banner, cross, and star;
air war, the mode of those
who live by symbols; the pure
abstraction of travel by air.
Here a spire holds up
an angel with trump and wings;
he's in *his* element.
Another lifts a hand
with forefinger pointing up
to admonish that all's not here.
All's not. But I aspire
downward. Flyers embrace
the air, and I'm a man
who needs something to hug.
All my dawns cross the horizon
and rise, from underfoot.
What I stand for
is what I stand on.

—WENDELL BERRY

from *A Part* (1980), in *Collected Poems of Wendell Berry, 1957–1982*. North Point Press (1985).

LETTER FROM MARY BERRY

PHOTO: BEN AGUILAR



Our work at The Berry Center is, I see now, based on the hope for an agrarian economy. One that destroys nothing and wastes nothing. An economy that frees people from servitude to an industrial economy. This will require the acceptance of economic and personal limits. Within limits lies the possibility of contentment, happiness, and joy. I believe this with all my heart.

WE DON'T HAVE A THEME for The Berry Center's newsletter in the same way we do for our yearly journal but I see one emerging for this one. It is a painful question: Where is our constituency?

My father has said that his father John Berry, Sr. did the important work and he and his brother John Berry, Jr. just took it up and now the Berry Center is continuing it. That work was and is to put a sustaining economy under good farming. A major difference is that we have a good deal less to work with than my grandfather did. In spite of a decades old local food movement, years of talk about local food systems, and at least two distinct back to the land movements in my memory we have continued to lose farmers

and farm land. Our most recent panic over supply chain disruptions caused by a global pandemic seems to have taught most of us nothing. Not even the difference between wants and needs.

I've learned many things from my family and here are just two of them:

1. What has happened to our rural communities has been destruction by design.
2. The cause of this destruction is industrialism.

Knowing the truth about what has happened gives us strength and hope. And, the sure knowledge that big solutions aren't what we are after. Big solutions are our problem and encourage us to believe that technology and money will solve our problems.

We don't need to wait for official permission to do something or for experts to fix things for us. If rural culture has been destroyed by design then we need a new design. But the design must come from the ground up. This is work for particular people working in particular places. By people who know, love and intend to stay in those places. As my husband said once to a group of young farmers, "The cavalry ain't coming." And that is all right.

The great tragedy of industrialism is that it treats everyplace as the same place. The industrial system's intent is to survive by consuming everything in its path and so ultimately destroying everything. It simply can't recognize the need for particular knowledge and it utterly discounts love and rewards selfishness. It is clear then that the defeat of rural communities and their cultures has been necessary to industrialism and the inevitable result of the industrial system's rapaciousness. The destruction of what we need to survive and to thrive.

And so I ask, "Where is our constituency?"

The conservatives, who are not conservative at all or they might be interested in conserving something, along with corporations have been turning rural America into money for themselves as fast as they can which is to say destroying the land and the people. Liberals rediscovered rural America after the election of Donald Trump and have condemned it as backward, racist, ignorant and not real America. What they aren't asking is what has happened here. It is a worry that some have now noticed that forests and farms can sequester carbon as if they don't do anything else useful. Moreover, it will take an agrarian culture, country people evidently despised, to use those forests and farms to sequester carbon while supplying our people with food, clothing, and shelter.

The Henry County, Kentucky that I grew up in was a thriving agricultural county although less so than during my father's childhood. The people I grew up around had a strong sense of themselves as country people although that was waning as well. I was well grown before I understood how much of our strength

came from the Burley Tobacco Program that kept farmers secure and kept the culture of good diversified farming passing from generation to generation. The memory of what that economic stability brought to our agricultural region is beautiful. It gives us a vision of what was and what could be again.

The vision is agrarian and I am an agrarian. I am for working landscapes and working people, the two never separated. I believe, as my grandfather did, that if you want a person to love their country, they should own a little piece of it. I am for an economy that would make this possible and would therefore build a population of people who understand how to use land and leave it better than they found it. I believe that our country is not our economy, our institutions, or the military. Our country is the land under our feet from which we get everything that we need. I believe in going to work where we are and where we have some idea of what we are doing. I believe in the virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope, and charity. I believe going to work where we are allays fear and that fear does not lead us to well thought out solutions. It certainly does not encourage patience which is what our efforts will take. I believe that the industrial economy that has destroyed so much of our economy is evil and that no manipulation can make it good.

Our work at The Berry Center is, I see now, based on the hope for an agrarian economy. One that destroys nothing and wastes nothing. An economy that frees people from servitude to an industrial economy. This will require the acceptance of economic and personal limits. Within limits lies the possibility of contentment, happiness, and joy. I believe this with all my heart.

And it is with a full heart that I thank our membership for your enduring support of the Center. Thank you for all the good you are doing in your own places. If you find yourselves near us please stop in for a visit. We will be glad to see you.

Your friend,

—MARY BERRY, Executive Director

BEYOND THE BERRY CENTER



AUTHOR DEBBIE BARKER, with panelists, Andrew Kimbrell, executive director and founder of Center for Food Safety, and Naglaa Ahmed, coordinator, SEKEM, present a workshop, “Advocating Ecological Food Systems for a Climate and Food Secure Future” at COP27.

Debbie Barker is the former international director for the Center for Food Safety and the co-director/executive director of the International Forum on Globalization. She currently does consulting work for the International Alliance on Climate and Agriculture.

GOVERNMENTS MEET EACH YEAR at international climate talks, known as the Conference of Parties (COP), but for many farmers and rural communities, these gatherings seem to have little relevance to their everyday lives. This article discusses recent happenings related to agriculture at the COP27, held in Egypt last November. The failure thus far of governments to lower emissions and meet other COP goals reinforces the tremendous relevance and necessity of programs such as TBC’s Our Home Place Meat and suggests that any hope of limiting global warming must come from good farming and stewardship by farmers around the globe.

★ ★ ★

Having attended several COPs over the last few decades, including last year’s COP27, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, I admit that it’s difficult not to be cynical about the results of these gatherings to date. As I listened to the earnest speeches by heads of state, corporate CEOs, philanthropic leaders, as well as civil society representatives, I was rather astounded that the words were essentially carbon copies of speeches given at the previous COPs I’ve attended. Press, play, repeat. The situation is urgent, we must act now, we are dedicating our governments, corporations, non-profits, citizens, etc., to addressing this issue, and other solemn platitudes streamed over loudspeakers and big screens. And yet each year greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increase and the planet continues to heat up.

COP gatherings are part of the process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a 1992 treaty acknowledging anthropogenic climate change and the need for nations to reduce emissions. COPs are held each year (with some exceptions) to craft resolutions and other mechanisms and assess progress in limiting climate change.

A hope and aim of some COP27 delegates was that this climate conference would focus more attention on the critical connections between climate change and agriculture. Our current global industrial agriculture system is a major contributor of GHGs, yet this is little discussed by governments, the media, or even environmental and climate change civil society groups. Equally ignored is how transitioning to ecological food and farm policies and practices would be a major way to reduce emissions while also better ensuring climate resilient crops for food security. (In UNFCCC parlance, ecological agriculture could serve as both an adaptation and mitigation strategy.)

“Recent reports have found that food systems are contributing up to one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, up to 80 percent of biodiversity loss, and [uses] up to 70 percent of freshwater,” Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, reminded an audience at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. “However, sustainable food production systems should be recognized as an essential solution to these existing challenges.” Such recognition led some to believe (and hope) that more attention would be



Plenty of research and science tells us that soil health impacts the entire carbon cycle and how we manage farms, ranches, forests, wetlands, and grasslands is central to limiting global warming. Further, solid science confirms that healthy soils can actually draw down CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it underground where it should be. Good farming and care of our landscapes and natural resources is essential if we have any chance of reducing GHG emissions and re-balancing the CO₂ in our atmosphere.

given to the necessity of ecology-based farming. Instead, most agriculture proposals, while making frequent use of terms such as “climate-smart,” “climate friendly,” and “sustainable agriculture,” were thinly veiled business-as-usual propositions.

The Agriculture Innovations Mission (AIM) for Climate, under the rubric of climate-smart agriculture, is an example of a program that is more of the same. AIM, a joint initiative launched at the 2021 COP26 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United Arab Emirates, bolsters the use of genetically engineered (GE) crops, nanotechnology, robotics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). USDA activities at COP27 were geared toward convincing governments, corporations, philanthropic organizations, the media and opinion leaders, and others that these agritech practices are solutions to climate change. The considerable participation and investment, already at more than \$8 billion, of multinational chemical and seed companies and agri-food corporations underpins AIM’s focus on a chemical-industrial-technology agriculture model.

Many civil society groups, notably from the global South, have stark critiques of programs such as AIM. “We reject the continued reliance on colonial thinking—producing staple crops using imported farm inputs, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid and GE (genetically engineered) seeds,” says a statement by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), one Africa’s largest organizations of farmers, pastoralists, consumer movements, and other civil society groups.

Groups such as AFSA, and some governments, are advocating, at times even pleading, for COPs to endorse and support agroecological approaches to farming. The term agroecology is unfamiliar to many in industrial countries, and is sometimes even looked upon with suspicion. But at its core, agroecology is simply an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable approach to food and farming. Agroecology recognizes that different practices are appropriate for different geographies, cultures, and available natural resources. And so this term can be useful in international settings as it can apply to a

farmer raising livestock in Kentucky or a farmer growing millet in Mali.

While one could be encouraged that ecological approaches to agriculture are at least on the scene at the COP, and perhaps gaining currency, the reality is that COP is dominated by industrial thinking that, unsurprisingly, proposes industrial solutions. And, whether farming in the global North or South, the global export-oriented model based on intensive use of inputs and resources has dismantled local food and farm communities and livelihoods everywhere and devastated our planet's ecology and natural resources.

Attended by over 50,000 people, the maze of pavilions with informational booths and workshops and the expo atmosphere is far removed from everyday concerns of farmers and rural communities. On the eve of departing for Egypt to attend COP27, I had dinner with Mary Berry who reflected, that from what she could tell, these climate gatherings had almost no relevance to farmers working with The Berry Center. And I'd have to agree, though with a few caveats about some value of the COP.

A central caveat is that the COP, along with the UNFCCC process, is one of the few venues where the global South can collectively, and with higher visibility than would otherwise be given, advocate for their needs and oppose programs that do not serve their needs. COP also sets up funding mechanisms to compensate developing countries for "loss and damage" caused by climate change. (Although COP27 was a shameful reminder that industrial countries have not lived up to their climate finance commitments for developing countries.) The increased frequency and intensity of cyclones, droughts, and climate-change related weather disasters have left millions of people hungry, undernourished, and landless in the global South. (The World Bank projects that 216 million people will be forced to migrate by 2050 if we continue at current GHG emission levels.)

Given the failure of COP participatory governments to deliver on any of their goals to reduce GHGs and to deliver adequate aid to regions experiencing the most devastating impacts of global warming, leads to reasonable questions: What can be done? Who can do it?

Knowing that our current global industrial agriculture system is a major culprit of global warming, an obvious imperative is to put into practice farming that protects and preserves land, ecosystems, local economies, cultures, and communities. Plenty of research and science tells us that soil health impacts the entire carbon cycle and how we manage farms, ranches, forests, wetlands, and grasslands is central to limiting global warming. Further, solid science confirms that healthy soils can actually draw down CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it underground where it should be. Good farming and care of our landscapes and natural resources is essential if we have any chance of reducing GHG emissions and re-balancing the CO₂ in our atmosphere.

Knowing that we can't wait for international bodies or national governments to solve climate change, it comes down to citizens and communities. The wise adage that there can be no global solution to climate change that won't work locally is especially true when it comes to our farm and food future. It comes down to programs like TBC's Home Place Meats, the farmers who participate, and the people who support it. It comes down to organizations such as AFSA and the farmers within these organizations working to save the land and livelihoods of millions of farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, and food producers.

And so we do these small things in our local communities, with great love (as Mother Theresa suggested). And we keep faith that these accumulative small, but powerful, actions can be a model, preserve essential knowledge that we may have forgotten, and forge a larger pattern that holds promise for our future.

—DEBBIE BARKER



Steve, thank you so much for sitting down with us. To begin with, where do you hail from and what is your background in agriculture?

I was raised on the farm my grandparents and parents farmed in eastern Henry County, Kentucky. We raised sheep, cattle, tobacco, chickens, and a few pigs. I initially went to college to obtain an agribusiness degree and teach agriculture. Upon graduation I was offered a loan officer position with the Federal Land Bank (an agricultural cooperative) making loans to farmers to purchase farms.

Looking back, have you seen a difference in the farming landscape over your lifetime?

Fewer farmers trying to farm more acres with increasing smaller profit margins has been the trend in farming all my life. This trend has resulted in our farmland being eroded by excessive grain cropping that is replacing family farming enterprises, all helped along by government-backed insurance programs.

I know you have extensive experience in financial services, has that been a boon to you in farming? Has the farming background impacted your career in finance?

Yes to both questions. First, farm chores starting at a young age taught self-discipline and accountability. Second, learning to understand and appreciate that like the seasons of the year there are seasons in life. This is a valuable enough lesson when life circumstances are going great, but even more important when life throws you a curve.

What brought you to the Berry Center?

I have admired what Mary Berry is doing with The Berry Center since I first became aware of it around 2015. When my daughter-in-law (Beth Douglas, director of Our Home Place Meat) asked if I could help out with some accounting tasks, I was grateful for the opportunity to volunteer.

What is most exciting to you about the work we do here?

At first it was the diversification. You can buy a book or buy a package of meat. That is unique. Digging deeper I cannot explain it any better than Mr. Berry when he says:

“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.”

What do you think is the most important thing that people don’t understand about rural places and the agricultural economy?

Most of our population is now several generations removed from rural life and farming. The idea of reaping what you sow has been lost to much of the non-rural population.

If you could tell everyone reading this one hopeful thing about the future of farming in this country, what would it be?

Do not bet against the farmer. There are plenty of surface issues and petty reasons to count us out, but do not. I too am sometimes frustrated with industry, government, and public policy but we are in the winter season, spring is coming.

—INTERVIEW BY BEN AGUILAR, Director of Operations



PHOTO: BEN AGUILAR

2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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|-------------|---|
| April 8 | The Berry Center Bookstore at The Kentucky Green Living Fair |
| April 22 | Earth Day |
| April 29 | Independent Bookstore Day |
| May 13 | Wendell Berry Farming Program of Sterling College Commencement |
| May 13-14 | The Berry Center Bookstore at the Locust Grove Gardeners Fair |
| May 15-17 | The Berry Center at The Paducah Garden Club GCA Flower Show |
| June 3 | The Berry Center Spring Open House |
| June 28 | The Berry Center Journal Release |
| July 29 | The Berry Center at the Henry County Harvest Showcase |
| July 29-30 | The Bookstore at The Berry Center Harvest Sale |
| September 9 | Agrarian Literary League (ALL) Fall Festival at The Berry Center |
| November 11 | Kentucky Arts and Letters Day at The Berry Center |



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



THE BERRY CENTER

THE BERRY CENTER's desire and the reason for its existence is to work on the problems of industrialism. Not just the symptoms of the problems. The media's collection of popular emergencies: climate change, species extinction, overpopulation, pollution, water shortage, ill health, pandemic, breakage of "supply chains," etc. This list leaves out the unpopular emergencies: soil erosion, toxic pollution of farmland and agricultural waterways, the destruction of farm communities. There are many "out of date" emergencies that return to popularity from time to time such as nuclear war and the accumulation of nuclear waste. Our social issues are taking up our time now but will fade as we now know that movements do. We believe that these are not the problem; they are the symptoms of the problem. The problem is industrialism and the industrial economy which ignores and transgresses every limit, denies the issue of scale, discounts every cost, and thrives and grows by consuming, once and for all, the living world.

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All members will receive the printed Berry Center summer journal, electronic seasonal newsletters, and 10% off at The Berry Center Bookstore. Port William Circle Members contributing an annual donation of \$1,000 or more will also receive a signed broadside by Wendell Berry.

For more information, please contact Ben Aguilar, Director of Operations,
at info@berrycenter.org or (502) 845-9200

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With sincere gratitude we thank those who have contributed to The Berry Center.



*"The way we are, we are members of each other. All of us. Everything.
The difference ain't who is a member and who is not,
but in who knows and who don't."*

—BURLEY COULTER

from *"The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership,"*
by Wendell Berry. (North Point Press, 1968.)