

When the sun rises, I go to work,  
When the sun goes down, I take my rest,  
I dig the well from which I drink,  
I farm the soil that yields my food,  
I share creation, Kings can do no more.  
--Ancient Chinese, 2500BC

What is the good of life if its chief element, and that which  
Must always be its chief element, is odious? No, the only true  
Economy is to arrange so that your daily labor shall itself be a joy.  
--Edward Carpenter

Excerpts from *Living the Good Life*  
Helen and Scott Nearing, Schocken Books, 1970

- This is a book about a twentieth century pioneering venture in a New England community. Most of the subject matter is derived from twenty years of living in the backwoods of Vermont. The book aims to present a technical, economic, sociological and psychological report on what we tried to do, how we did it, and how well we succeeded in our purposes.
- Our sense of responsibility as teachers, and as members of the human race, compelled us to do what we could (1) to help our fellow citizens understand the complex and rapidly maturing situation; (2) to assist in building up a psychological and political resistance to the plutocratic military oligarchy that was sweeping into power in North America; (3) to share in salvaging what was still usable from the wreckage of the decaying social order in North America and Western Europe; (4) to have a part in formulation the principles and practices of an alternative social system, while meanwhile (5) demonstrating one possibility of living sanely in a troubled world.
- We left the city with three objectives in mind. The first was *economic*. We sought to make a depression-free living, as independent as possible of the commodity and labor markets.... Our second aim was *hygienic*. We wanted to maintain and improve our health .... Our third objective was *social and ethical*. We desired to liberate and dissociate our selves, as much as possible, from the cruder forms of exploitation: the plunder of the planet ....
- Simplicity, serenity, utility and harmony are not the only values in life, but they are among the important ideals, objectives and concepts which the seeker after the good life might reasonably expect to develop in a natural and social environment.
- Our aim was to get a year's livelihood in return for half a year of bread labor.
- We built up our gardens by hauling in any available top-soil and we increased its fertility by consistently making and using compost, which enriched the soil instead of exhausting it .... For years we put nothing on our garden except compost.
- We believe ... that nutrition is one of the primary factors in determining the health, happiness and usefulness of every human being.
- We are opposed to the theories of a competitive, acquisitive, aggressive, war-making social order ... It is better to love, create and construct than to hate, undermine and destroy ....

- When I made the decision to work toward eating only what we grew, the likelihood that we would every reach that goal seemed remote. Our mutation from vegetable gardeners to mini-farmers evolved very slowly, over time. We learned as we went.
- Over time, our success at extending the season evolved into a decision that we should try growing all our own vegetables and as much of our fruit as we could.... I wanted to prove that eating locally was feasible, healthy, and even tasty....
- I began conducting workshops to explore the limits of local eating.... I would open these with a little rap about the 5 calorie strawberry flown to New York from California at a cost of 435 calories as an example of the unsustainability of our present food system.
- The reasons why so much of our food does not come from nearby often have little to do with climate.... Because the value of unfettered global trade is unquestioned and petroleum is artificially cheap, these sorts of costs are not being examined.
- I realized that several years earlier, without really knowing we had stepped over a line, we had achieved the goal I had been heading toward for years. We had reached the point where we simply never bought a vegetable.
- We need to keep local farmers in business.... Although many people claim to be unhappy with the way farming has been industrialized, they don't make a connection between their demand for stone fruit in mid-winter and global food chain that brings them cheap food from wherever in the world farmers can be paid the least to grow it.
- Would the world be better off environmentally if we all became vegetarians?... My exploration led me to conclude that vegetarianism on a global scale is, and always has been, impossible.... Banishing livestock would reduce the planet's overall supply of food and cause the humans who depend on animals to starve.
- Whatever you choose to eat, and wherever you get it, the true cost of your food will, almost inevitably, include death.... Death is one of the true costs of our food.... We're all killers. We either do it personally or through surrogates, but we simply can't avoid the fact that, if we eat, killing is being done on our behalf.
- Which lands me in the middle of what is the most abstract and certainly the least comfortable reason for trying to eat locally: a profound concern for the future of the planet.
- If we take away the subsidies that support the present food system – cheap fuel and water, public funding of high-tech agricultural research, massive public investments in infrastructure, including overbuilt highways to handle giant truckloads of traveling food – we can invest them in a food system that conserves soil, water, air and human resources, *and* produces reasonably priced food.

- This book tells the story of what we learned, or didn't; what we ate, or couldn't; and how our family changed by one year of deliberately eating food produced in the same place where we worked, loved our neighbors, drank the water, and breathed the air.
- We're increasingly wary of an industry that puts stuff in our dinner we can't identify as animal, vegetable, mineral, or what.... We are a nation with an eating disorder and we know it.
- Every food calorie we presently eat ... costs ten calories for every one food calorie produced. That's *before* it gets shipped anywhere.
- Industrial farming methods, wherever they are practiced, promote soil erosion, salinization, desertification, and loss of soil fertility.
- The main barrier standing between ourselves and a local-food culture is not price, but attitude.
- Humans have eaten some 80,000 plant species in our history... In Peru, the original home of potatoes, Andean farmers once grew four thousand potato varieties. Modern U.S. consumers now get to taste less than 1 percent of the vegetable varieties that were here a century ago.
- Six companies – Monsanto, Syngenta, Du Pont, Mitsui, Aventis, and Dow – now control 98 percent of the world's seed sales.
- Much money is made in the global reshuffling of food, but the main beneficiaries are processors, brokers, shippers, supermarkets, and oil companies ... While passing bargains on to consumers, this pits farmers in one country against those in another, in a downward wage spiral. Product quality is somewhat irrelevant.
- The recent popularity of agriculture that damages soil fertility still does not change the truth: what every farmer needs is sustainability, the capacity to coax productiveness out of the same plot year after year.
- Farming is not for everyone; increasingly it's hardly for anybody. Over the last decade our country has lost an average of 300 farms a week.
- Buying your goods from local businesses rather than national chains generates about three times as much money for your local economy.
- *Eaters must understand, how we eat determines how the world is used.*
- The blunt biological truth is that we animals can only remain alive by eating other life.... To believe we can live without taking life is delusional... The more we know about our food system, the more we are called into complex choices.
- The truth is so horrific: we are marching ourselves to the maw of our own extinction.

- It was not until I was fifty-five years old that I realized that my life had followed roads so less traveled by that even Robert Frost might have shaken his head in doubt and wonder ... In all important ways, this book is true. I hope it gives encouragement to others who are wandering through life looking or wondering if there is such a thing as home. Believe me, there is.
- For two years I poured on paper an idealized version of the life on the home farm, escaping by that means, the anguish of my real life.
- Is there any hope for a world where society accepts extreme wealth and extreme poverty side by side?
- I never did get a Ph.D. No man is master of his fate, or gets where he goes purely on his own decisions. We all float along on whims of chance, like thistledown on an August breeze.
- I hated the clamor, the seemingly pointless bustle, the dense diesel bus fumes downtown ... I swore under my breath that I would beat the wage-slavocracy that chained me to the city and escape.
- We bought a small house with two acres and pretended it was a farm ... I slowly realized that with very skillful horticulture, a family could produce almost all its food on two acres, or indeed one acre ... This discovery electrified me. I did not necessarily have to have a farm in the conventional sense to live the kind of life I desired.... What could be more revolutionary than to pursue a self-subsistent life right in the middle of suburbia?
- Then another “coincidence” occurred that made me wonder I were following a script already written for me. I found *Organic Gardening* magazine, which was espousing the same gardening vision that was taking hold of me. I went to see Bob Rodale, [who] said everything about the future of food production that I believed but had been afraid to say out loud. “The typical farm of the future may very well be just a very large garden,” he said.
- I had actually made it back home to stay.... I thought of my work as a model for a new kind of commercial garden-farm of the future.
- Like a bad dream, the various steps of my slow, stumbling journey to get back to where I belonged sped across my memory, took wing, and disappeared forever over the horizon to time. I was, as much as one could wish for in America of 1974, at age forty-three, free of people telling me how I had to live to “reach my full potential.”
- What was happening here did not happen by accident. It was not funded by wealth either. It was planned and worked for with sweat, blood and tears.
- But I came home to become a shepherd in another way, also unanticipated. I became a shepherd of homesick humans.... It was obvious that most people were trying to come home, if not literally, then to some place they could make into a new home.