



UNH Links Sustainable Agriculture, Land-Grant Universities, And Environmental Philosopher Aldo Leopold

It is not meant for all of us to farm. But it is meant for all of us to eat. And we all have a right to nutritious food to keep us 'healthy, wealthy and wise.' To the greatest extent possible, this means local food.

-- John E. Carroll

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DURHAM, N.H. -- A new book from University of New Hampshire's Agricultural Experiment Station explores the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the growing movement toward sustainable agriculture. "The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food: Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic and Sustainable Agriculture," the tenth book by Professor of Environmental Conservation John E. Carroll, links the philosophical roots and values of sustainable agriculture as articulated by Leopold to the movement's practical application in four of the nation's land-grant universities.

"This book is filled with wisdom: Aldo Leopold's wisdom and the wisdom of the multitude of people at the four land-grant universities in the case studies," says Carroll, who writes about the teaching, research and extension at the universities of Maine, Vermont, Wisconsin and Iowa State University. "Land-grant universities – including our own – have an opportunity to make a real contribution in sustainable agriculture."

Carroll, a champion of sustainable food systems that embrace small-scale farming and local food, turns to the eminent American environmental philosopher Aldo Leopold and his essay "The Land Ethic" from his classic "The Sand County Almanac" for the value system on which the sustainable agriculture movement is built. "Aldo Leopold's 'The Land Ethic' is arguably the most famous document in sustainable agriculture," said Carroll. In it, Leopold lays out a need for an ethical relationship to the land and a movement of our educational and economic systems toward an intense consciousness of the land.

Sustainable agriculture, with its emphasis on local conditions, a sense of place, and working with rather than against nature, embodies Leopold's land ethic, Carroll writes.

"The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food" then explores how Leopold's land ethic is practiced at four of the nation's land-grant universities: the land-grant universities of Iowa and Wisconsin in the agricultural Midwest, both with ties to Leopold; and the New England universities of Vermont and Maine, which have 15-year histories in sustainable agriculture.

"They are our sister institutions," says Carroll of the universities of Vermont and Maine. "What

they do is translatable and transferable to New Hampshire. It plots a course for what we can be at UNH.”

Indeed, Carroll describes sustainable agriculture, small farms, and local foods as ideal for New England. “We’re not talking about commodity-scale agriculture. We’re talking about the New England reality,” he says.

While New England could never produce all of its own food, Carroll advocates for a decreased reliance on food that currently travels 1,500 miles on average. “There are enormous reasons staring us in the face for why we need to have local food,” he says. Our current system of agriculture compromises the nutrition and taste of food, pollutes the land on which it’s grown and the environment via the fossil fuels needed for production and transport, and is not as secure as locally grown food.

Carroll, who is working on a sequel to this book that will focus on New Hampshire and its immediate neighbors, says “The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food” is relevant not only to farmers, producers and academics but also to what he calls “the farmer’s market crowd” – the growing number of customers for local and sustainable agriculture.

“We’re experiencing a Renaissance of local agriculture here in New England and at UNH,” says Carroll, pointing to initiatives such as UNH’s new organic dairy farm, the Organic Gardening Club, and the efforts of the Office of Sustainability. “I see this book as part of that Renaissance.”