

Media Relations

New Book Gives "The Real Dirt" On New England's Sustainable Agriculture

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DURHAM, N.H. – New England – romantically imagined as a gentle landscape of rolling farmland dotted with lazily grazing livestock – produces less of its own food than any other region in the nation. This reliance on food imported using fossil fuels over an aging transportation infrastructure makes New Englanders vulnerable to food insecurity, says University of New Hampshire professor John Carroll in a new book, "The Real Dirt."

"We have a greater inability to feed ourselves than the rest of the nation," says Carroll, a professor of natural resources and the environment. Vermont and Maine, he says, can produce food to feed about 20 percent of their populations; Massachusetts can feed 10 percent; and New Hampshire produces enough food for just 5 percent of its people.

"The Real Dirt" follows Carroll's "The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food" (2005) and "Pastures of Plenty" (2008) as the third in a trilogy of books looking at sustainable agriculture and food security in New England. The audience for the book, he

says, is "anyone who eats and lives in this region. The book will give them a far deeper understanding of their own food."

In "The Real Dirt," Carroll explores the precarious interconnection of oil and agriculture, declaring agriculture the first victim of cheap oil. He offers examples of town-level agriculture commissions and small gardens as two ways to support greater local food production. The localvore scene of Burlington, Vermont, a city that produces 10 percent of its own food, serves as a case study for enhancing local food production.

In the second part of the book, Carroll provides the first-ever comprehensive look at the university farms of all six New England land-grant universities and the roles they play – past, present, and future – in their states' capacity for food production. "They are almost universally underutilized," says Carroll. He notes that UNH is unique in the concentration of its farms, all within six miles of the center of campus. "Our farms are accessible to undergraduates, and many of them are on the bus system," he says.

"The Real Dirt" looks at research, facilities, and programs at the various farms held by the six universities, from the University of Maine's blueberry research to UNH's own landmark organic dairy to sustainable agriculture curriculum at several institutions.

Carroll concludes "The Real Dirt" with cautious optimism about New England's renaissance – "you could even say revolution," he says – of food and agriculture. Renewed interest in home gardens and backyard chickens, the proliferation of farmers markets and consumer-supported agriculture all point to a more food-secure future.

"We're moving in the right direction, there's no doubt about it," he says. "But we could do a lot more."

Research for "The Real Dirt" was funded by the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station. It is available at bookstores throughout New Hampshire, directly from the author (carroll@unh.edu), or by



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Caption: "The Real Dirt," by UNH professor John Carroll, looks at sustainable food and agriculture in New England. Credit: Illustration by Karen Busch Holman.

downloading this flyer: <http://extension.unh.edu/news/realdirtfier.pdf>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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Book jacket available to download: http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/mar/bp24food_cover.jpg

Caption: "The Real Dirt," by UNH professor John Carroll, looks at sustainable food and agriculture in New England.

Credit: Illustration by Karen Busch Holman.

Author photograph to download: http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/mar/bp24food_01.jpg

Caption: John Carroll, University of New Hampshire professor of natural resources and the environment and author of "The Real Dirt"

Credit: Photo by Julian Russell

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