Wisconsin people & ideas. Volume 53, Number 2 Spring 2007

Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, Spring 2007

wisconsin people & ideas

WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS AND LETTERS

Building Bridges

Wisconsin farmers and Mexican workers come together in an innovative new program

SPECIAL EDITION
The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin

AG INNOVATIONS
Exciting developments you should know about

THE SECOND SHIFT
How farmers get health care, and other hardships

WISCONSIN'S PEOPLE ON THE LAND
A visual arts perspective

POETRY CONTEST WINNERS GO RURAL

WHY WE LIVE WHERE WE LIVE
Essays by Jane Hamilton, Mike Perry, Dean Bakopoulos, Jackie Mitchard, and Norbert Blei

Spring 2007
Volume 53,
Number 2

Price: $5

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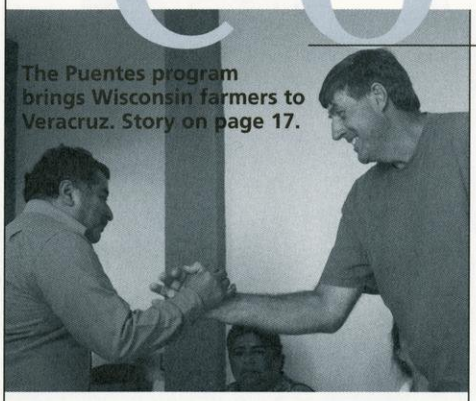

The Puentes program brings Wisconsin farmers to Veracruz. Story on page 17.

SPECIAL EDITION

The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin

A look at some of the most important issues to arise from our multiyear initiative, including contributions from the visual and literary arts and humanities. See page 43 for a roundup of related events this spring.

features

Wisconsin People & Ideas (formerly the *Wisconsin Academy Review)* (ISSN 1558-9633) is published quarterly by the nonprofit Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and is distributed **free of charge** to Wisconsin Academy members. For information about joining, see enclosed card or refer to the contact information below.

Wisconsin People & Ideas
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Tradition meets headphones as these Native American women gather milkweed. Story on page 31.

Photo (detail) by Tom Jones

We thank Bruce Jacobs for his generous support of this special edition of *Wisconsin People & Ideas*.

ENLIGHTEN YOUR LIFE!

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas from all areas of knowledge and all walks of life to learn about the latest achievements in thought and culture in our state and explore how we can best address our problems. It is a place where all people can come for reliable, unbiased information and interaction with Wisconsin's most innovative thinkers.

The Wisconsin Academy was founded in 1870 as an independent, nonprofit membership organization separate from the state and the university. For financial support we rely on grants, donors, and our members.

Enrich your life (and receive this magazine regularly) by becoming a member! Send in the enclosed membership card or register at www.wisconsinacademy.org

The Wisconsin Humanities Council is a proud sponsor of *Wisconsin People & Ideas* and provides content for a special section in each edition.

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community through conversation

The Power of the Academy

Like some kinds of planetary alignments, this one happens only every few years.

It's a special time when all four of the Wisconsin Academy's core programs—the James Watrous Gallery in Overture, Academy Evenings, *Wisconsin People & Ideas,* and the Wisconsin Idea at the Wisconsin Academy—fire off at once.

The Wisconsin Idea at the Wisconsin Academy is the weightiest of our programs. Each Wisconsin Idea initiative is carried out over several years and seeks to have lasting impact on public policy, education, and civil discourse in our state.

The culmination of these initiatives is a statewide conference. And we are now at that point with the latest Wisconsin Idea: The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin, which holds its gathering May 14–15. A report will follow this summer to serve as a blueprint—based on the best knowledge available and informed by a wide array of experts, stakeholders, and citizens—of how to forge a sustainable, vibrant future for farming and our rural communities.

These are the moments when the Wisconsin Academy truly shines. Our interdisciplinary mission calls for us to offer wall-to-wall programming from many different perspectives, providing depth, breadth, and context to the issues at hand. Some highlights: A James Watrous Gallery exhibition called "Wisconsin's People on the Land," opening April 3, presents rural-themed works by some of our state's most noted artists, accompanied by comment from scholars from different disciplines. This edition of *Wisconsin People & Ideas* provides additional perspectives, including a piece about the exhibition in which the artists and their subjects talk about what farming and rural life mean to them (see page 31). Our statewide poetry contest this year focused on farming and rural life; you can read the winning works beginning on page 56. For our Academy Evening on May 8, we are pleased to welcome our cover subjects, Shaun Judge Duvall, Carl Duley, and John Rosenow, for a talk about Puentes, a program they founded to foster better understanding between workers from Mexico and the Wisconsin farmers who employ them. And on May 13, 7:30 pm, we are honored to present the Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society in a performance of rural-themed music, including an exhibition-inspired composition by rural sociologist Michael Bell. That special ticketed event takes place in the MMoCA lecture hall at the Overture Center for the Arts.

In short, this is one of the most sweeping one-themed orchestrations of programming the Wisconsin Academy ever has produced. You'll find a complete overview of events on page 43.

It's always dangerous to start thanking people. Inevitably many deserving souls (and there have been dozens on this project) get overlooked. But I am safe in saying that this initiative would not have happened without the efforts of co-chairs Tom Lyon and Stan Gruszynski (Stan's on page 4). Project director Wilda Nilsestuen and assistant Amy Martin have been dedicated and hardworking beyond measure. Bill Berry, who serves as guest co-editor of this issue, has been conducting effective communication work throughout the process.

We now stand ready to enjoy the fruits of their labor and that of the many people behind the project. It's going to be quite a show—and we very much hope you'll join us.

Joan Fischer
jfischer@wisconsinacademy.org

UP AND COMING

ACADEMY EVENINGS

Overture Center for the Arts, 201 State St. Free tickets (recommended to ensure seating) are available one week prior to presentation at the James Watrous Gallery in Overture. Hours: Tues/Wed/Thurs 11–5; Fri/Sat 11–9; Sun 1–5

Stem Cells 101: The Latest News, Our Future Challenges
Ian Duncan, UW–Madison
Tues. April 17, 7–8:30 pm,
MMoCA lecture hall

NEW
Wisconsin Farmers and Mexican Workers: Building Bridges between Two Cultures
Puentes founders Shaun Duvall, Carl Duley, and dairy farmer John Rosenow
Tues. May 8, 7–8:30 pm,
MMoCA lecture hall

Note: A presentation by Will Allen and Growing Power has been canceled.

ACADEMY EVENINGS AROUND THE STATE

In Milwaukee

The American Indian: A National Visual Arts Tribute
Truman Lowe, UW–Madison
Thurs. April 19, 7–8:30 pm
Milwaukee Art Museum
700 N. Art Museum Drive

In the Fox Cities

Outbreak! Bird Flu, AIDS, and Biological Warfare
Dennis Maki, UW–Madison
Thurs. April 26, 7–8:30 pm
UW–Fox Valley, 1478 Midway Road, Menasha

In Sheboygan

Healing Words: Poetry and True Story in Medical Settings
Art Derse, M.D., Medical College of Wisconsin, and Ellen Kort, first Wisconsin poet laureate
Thurs. May 10, 6:30-8 pm
John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 608 New York Ave.

The Desire for Engagement

The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin lights a fire in the body politic

BY STAN GRUSZYNSKI, PROJECT CO-CHAIR

The longer I live, the more I recognize the truth of the old adage about the journey being of more consequence than the destination, goal, or outcome. At the very least, it serves as a good reminder that it is well worth the effort to pay attention to what is going on around us.

So it has been for me with the Future of Farming and Rural Life initiative, which began at the Wisconsin Academy almost two years ago and is heading toward a culminating conference May 14–15 and a report with policy recommendations due in summer.

From the earliest discussions and throughout the planning, the project's advisory and coordinating committees did not deviate from their commitment to informed dialogue and public participation, core values of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters since its creation in 1870.

The reward for this principled approach will be a final report that will carry some weight and have credibility with policymakers and the larger public.

The subject of the future of farming and rural life has quite a scope and lends itself to a broad range of interests. Such is the diversity of agriculture and rural life in our state.

Consider the topic of production agriculture. This is like cells dividing in that single forms become a multitude of variations, ranging from small-scale, highly specialized niche production to the siting of 2,000- and 3,000-head dairy and hog operations. Today we have row cropping for ethanol, organic farming and grazing are thriving, and many are still making a go of it on the kinds of farms of our past that so many Wisconsinites consider their heritage.

Of course, farming and agriculture are both myth and reality for most of us. This is why the "journey" may ultimately play a more important role in the determination of Wisconsin's rural future than will the final summary document containing the recommendations and goals.

Let me share why I am reaching this conclusion. As daunting as the project seemed and as unwieldy as were the subject matter and methodology, the call for public participation did not fall on deaf ears. Each of the six forums we held around the state drew broad and diverse audiences who proved by their participation that the issues and concerns surrounding Wisconsin's rural future matter to them.

Not only did citizens have something to say about planned discussion topics that included health care, public education, food and nutrition, and land use planning—they came prepared to raise topics of their own. They expressed the desire to be at the table when policy is made. They provided an expanded view of what farming means and where it can occur. They expressed themselves on topics like government roles and responsibilities, energy production, the environment, social justice, and more.

I came away from the forums with a clear sense that a growing desire for engagement and participation is gathering energy in the body politic of our state. Regular citizens are choosing to play a greater role in the development of sound local economics. There is a desire to build capacity through cooperation and collaboration, with the expectation that all levels of government work together.

As someone who has spent a good portion of his adult life in the public arena and has endured more than a few cynical moments, what I have seen and heard is inspiring.

I really shouldn't be surprised. Our forebears in this state gave rise to the Wisconsin Idea, built our public schools and universities, instituted public reforms, and led a progressive movement that spread its roots in our soil and beyond. I am sure if they have the opportunity, our citizens are capable of engaging their government and charting a future for rural Wisconsin achievable with the human and natural resources with which we have been blessed, in a manner both practical and sustainable.

What I find interesting and commendable is that the energy to achieve these things seems less induced by the prospect of a final report from the Wisconsin Academy than the effort of citizens coming together as they journeyed throughout last year's forums. It reminds me of the T.S. Eliot line, "They arrived where they started and know the place for the first time."

I feel honored and privileged to co-chair this project with my friend and collaborator, Tom Lyon. I have benefited and learned from the many people associated with the Wisconsin Academy, and I have been reminded once again what an exceptional place Wisconsin is and how truly fine are its citizens. ✺

Stan Gruszynski, a former state legislator, is director of the rural leadership and community development program at UW–Stevens Point's Global Environmental Management Education Center.

The arts in small places

Two of Wisconsin's most magical and picturesque settings are located just a dozen or so miles apart in the rolling hills of Iowa County. They also happen to be two of the most dynamic places in the state to experience the wonders of Wisconsin's rural arts scene, with creative offerings as rich and deep as the soil on which they're built.

Shake Rag Alley in Mineral Point is built around Federal Spring, one of the first places where Native Americans, and later white settlers, made their homes in southwestern Wisconsin's Driftless region. Originally a small collection of dwellings for lead miners and their families, the area was referred to in mining years as Shake Rag Under the Hill, because miners' wives once shook rags out the window to let their husbands know that dinner was ready. Miners built log and stone cabins in the little valley; one from 1828 still survives, alongside stone and brick cottages from the 1840s.

The miners are gone now, but a different sort of richness now bubbles up on this very spot: Shake Rag Alley, a vibrant arts center at the edge of downtown Mineral Point, where one can spend a weekend constructing chairs of bent willow, painting abstract images, or making Celtic jewelry. Every weekend is a little bit different, and every season's offerings are both eclectic and unpredictable.

Shake Rag Alley workshops offer a wide variety of subjects and nearly all of them are open to beginners or novices. Each season features strong concentrations in rustic (willow, twig, natural materials, garden art), cementitious (concrete/mosaic), fiber (spin/weave/felt/basketry) and theatrical/literary (film, stage, screen, writing) arts. Out-of-towners can even book overnight accommodations in one of Shake Rag's whimsical and comfortable guest rooms and apartments, or enjoy refreshments at Shake Rag's Grace Café (the "hearty artist" breakfast and one-of-a-kind baked French toast alone is worth the drive; call ahead for hours).

While Shake Rag may appear to be a perfectly planned artist's haven, it came into being through a series of individual and community initiatives. In the early 1970s, Al Felly, a florist from Madison, purchased the stone house across the street from Shake Rag and then began to purchase, one by one, the several small properties that today make up the 2.5 acres of Shake Rag Alley. Felly did a lot of the restoration work that made Shake Rag such a picturesque place. After Felly sold the property in 1990, the unique property changed hands a number of times.

In October 2004, just as the property was about to be sold as a private residence, a group of Mineral Point artists moved swiftly and set up a nonprofit organization to buy the property and run it as an art education facility, building on Mineral Point's longstanding reputation as an artistic, progressive community. The Shake Rag Alley organization continues to work hard to repair the historic buildings for classroom and lodging

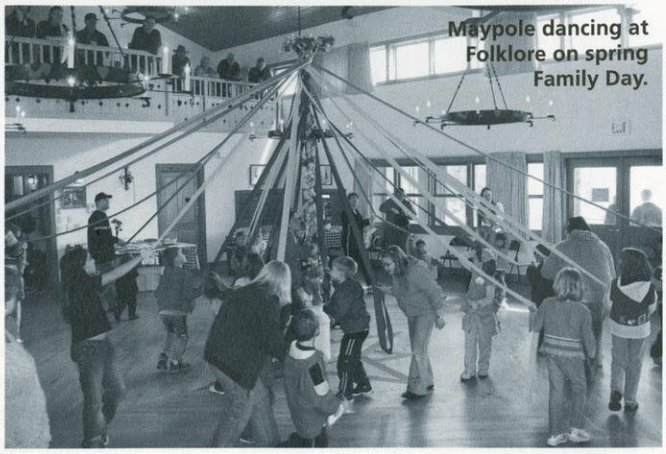
Artist John Schakel makes willow furniture at Shake Rag's annual Woodlanders Gathering.

For more information

Shake Rag Alley, www.shakeragalley.com, info@ShakeRagAlley.com, tel. 608/987-3292
Folklore Village, www.folklorevillage.org, staff@folklorevillage.org, tel. 608/924-4000
For more on the Driftless region, turn to page 8.
For more on life in Mineral Point, turn to page 50.

Shake Rag's log cabin from 1828 is the oldest building in Mineral Point. It will reap the benefit of a hands-on restoration workshop this summer.

Striking up a tune at Folklore's Swedish Weekend.



Maypole dancing at Folklore on spring Family Day.

use and to maintain the garden landscaping. It's a mammoth task; some of the infrastructure is almost 200 years old.

Two of the women behind the evolution of Shake Rag from miners' camp to artists' playground are Judy Sutcliffe and Sandy Scott. (The pair also own the Longbranch Gallery, one of the many excellent galleries in Mineral Point.)

Mineral Point, and specifically Shake Rag Alley, serve as models of how the arts can help a city of any size maintain a strong economy and a brisk tourist trade.

"Shake Rag Alley's reputation is national in scope, attracting people from all across the country to southwestern Wisconsin," Scott says. "It benefits the region by drawing workshop participants into the community, often for two- or three-day workshops, allowing them time to enjoy shopping, eateries, lodging, and introducing them to the wealth of art, architecture, and history of Mineral Point and the surrounding area. Shake Rag Alley also enhances the region's strong reputation in the arts. Shake Rag Alley instructors come from many parts of the nation, but many of Shake Rag Alley's artisan instructors live in the Tri-State area and are happy to augment their income as artists with the teaching of their crafts."

In spite of all the challenges, the organization continues to expand. This summer the Alley Stage, an outdoor theater, will debut in a small limestone quarry area on the Shake Rag property, seating about 100 people. Headed by actor, director, and playwright Coleman, the fledgling theatrical company intends to perform original works for small casts and is looking for plays by area writers.

A little east of Mineral Point, in rural Dodgeville, a quaint country farmstead continues to be a center of artistic expression and community life. Folklore Village is the vision of Jane Farwell, whose family worked the land in the very same spot that is now home to this unique institution. Farwell left the farm to attend Antioch College in the 1930s and earned a degree in rural recreation leadership. When she returned to southwestern Wisconsin, she did so with a vision to use folk life education as a way to foster individual development and strengthen communities. The organization officially came into being in 1974, but Farwell had hosted community programs at the farm well before that.

One of the most dynamic elements of Folkore Village's programming is the fact that visitors to Folklore Village not only learn about folklife traditions, they experience them. (Even this author, not known for public displays of silliness, found himself doing a bit of German folk dancing at last year's Christmas celebration.)

Doug Miller, longtime executive director of this truly unique institution, explains that the philosophy behind the organization is something that he thinks of as "cultural ecology."

"We present a wide range of programs that help participants explore the active relationships between people, place, time, and traditions," Miller says. "This holistic approach helps people of all ages and backgrounds find personally relevant connections to those traditions and practices that connect individuals, families, communities, and nations. We believe that this understanding is essential to the health of human societies at all levels—locally, regionally, and internationally."

Indeed, recent programs have included everything from old-time fiddlin' to Cajun dance to the village's famous Christmas programs. Many of the events begin with potluck suppers, and attendees interact with one another through dinner discussions, the washing of dishes, and, of course, singing, dancing, creating, and music. In a world where cultural events can be very passive experiences, Folklore Village is a place where they can be active, and attendees can meet new people while taking part in traditions from many different cultures, some from around the block and others from around the world.

Because of the diversity of its programming, Folklore Village works with a wide range of groups, including those involved in the arts, humanities, social services, public schools, and habitat restoration and preservation. Over 10,000 people from all over southwestern Wisconsin, the Upper Midwest, and the United States visit the site each year to take part in its more than 100 yearly programs.

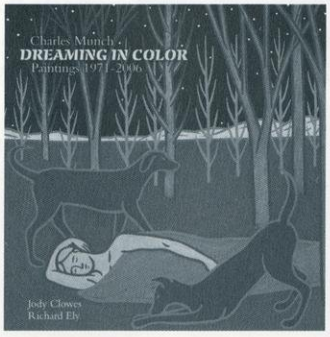
by Dean Bakopoulos

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

Dreaming in Color is a book about the paintings of the artist Charles Munch. It tells the story of how those paintings were made and is a must-read for those who are curious about the connection between an artist's life and the visual expression that comes from it. *Dreaming in Color* vividly makes that connection visible—it shows us, in a direct and readable manner, how Munch's art and his personal life are mingled.

Charles Munch has combined a love of nature and a career as a paintings conservator with a life as a committed, enthusiastic, professional artist to arrive, some 30 years later, at a mature style that bears witness to the process of change. *Dreaming in Color* takes the reader on the same journey.

Munch is an artist with a deep grounding in art history; for seven "blissful" months in 1971, he and his partner, Jane Furchgott, toured Europe in a VW camper studying the collections of most of the major museums. His knowledge of Old Master painters' technique and content, complexity, and luminosity carries over in subtle ways in his very personal style that appears at first so different from theirs.



Munch's abrupt jump in the early 1980s from one visual language to another might seem inexplicable. What seems like a settled style for an artist—an accomplished celebration of light and color in rendering the figure, still life, and landscape in a traditional realist manner—suddenly veers toward highly personal expressionist images that emanate from the artist's inner vision. A 1980 oil on canvas titled *Reclining Still Life* depicts with meticulous glowing realism a horizontal array of everyday objects—pickle jar, drapery, basket, teapot, and model sailboat on a shelf next to a window looking out on a wintry landscape. It honors the outward identities of these objects made special by the artist's care.

Only one year later, with *Cedars and Poplars,* Munch has arrived at a visual vocabulary that projects his own inner life onto nature. The forms of trees, leaves, and grass are rendered in stylizations that allow us to feel his raptures in that landscape. Color, form, and light are liberated to show us the thought rhythms that spring from his meditations on nature and humankind's complicated place in it. In other paintings that follow, all sorts of ecstasies as well as worrying image juxtapositions result: life is glorious as well as terrifying. Munch reassures us with color and light; beauty is our reliable guide on these painted journeys, and our fear and trembling is soothed with visual delight.

Writers Jody Clowes and Richard Ely provide essays that narrate Charles Munch's art-making career as well as his personal life. Clowes has written a concise critical analysis tracing Munch's evolution as an artist in formal terms. Ely weaves his biography with strands of art activity combined with family history, personal relationships, and Munch's changing ideas about how life is to be lived and how the paintings are to be made.

Together, these essays do a wonderful job of showing us changes in an artist's life and art in an enjoyably forthright manner without relying on "art speak" or academic pomposity.

Dreaming in Color was published to coincide with an exhibition last October of Charles Munch paintings from the years 1971 to 2006 at the Fairfield Center for Contemporary Art in Sturgeon Bay. It is widely available at bookstores, online at Amazon or Borders, or may be ordered from Trails Books, 800/258-5830.

Review by Randall Berndt, co-director, Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery

Dreaming in Color: Charles Munch Paintings 1971–2006 by Jody Clowes and Richard Ely, Fairfield Center for Contemporary Art/Prairie Oak Press (2006)

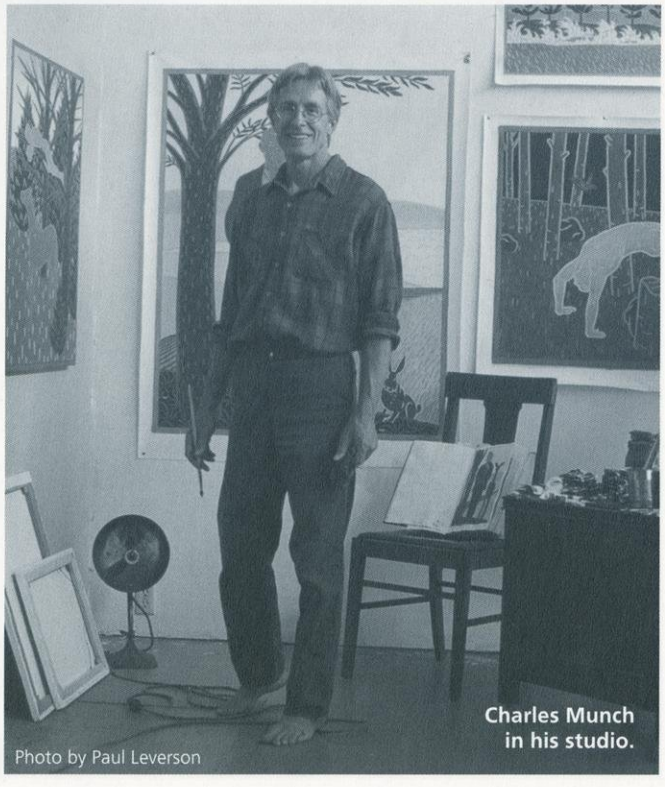
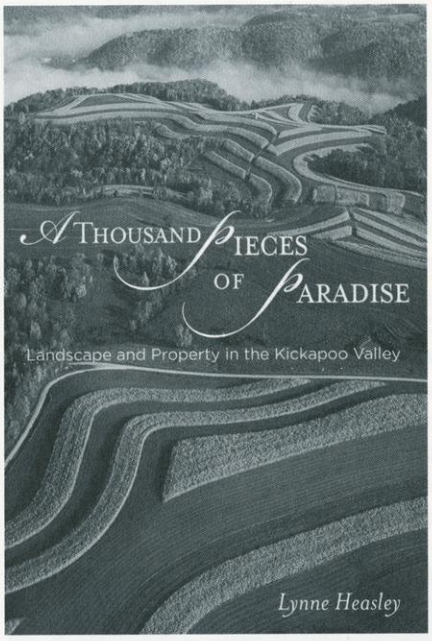


Photo by Paul Leverson

Charles Munch in his studio.

PICKING UP THE PIECES



"There is only one question," writes poet Mary Oliver: "How to love this world." And this world consists to a large extent of the ground beneath our feet and the landscape that extends to the horizon. How best to preserve, defend, and enjoy this limited resource of real estate becomes a complex question and a lightning rod for controversy, especially in places that have proved to be too beautiful for their own good.

A Thousand Pieces of Paradise: Landscape and Property in the Kickapoo Valley by Lynne Heasley, University of Wisconsin Press (2005)

Just on the other side of nowhere, the Kickapoo Valley, a.k.a. "Little Appalachia" and "the Ozarks of Wisconsin," has not yet succumbed to strip malls and superhighways. But as geographer Lynne Heasley guides us along the wooded crests and through the deep-cut coulees of southwestern Wisconsin in her book *A Thousand Pieces of Paradise*, she presents a well-crafted ecological history of this magical land as "a local chapter in a national book" on the American land-use wars of the 20th century.

The Kickapoo River begins north of Wilton in Monroe County and meanders southward through three counties until it meets the mighty Wisconsin River near Wauzeka. The life source of the valley, the Kickapoo is also the mother of

The beautiful, distinctive landscape of the Kickapoo Valley.

Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Hoffmann

deadly floods. The neighborhood's meal ticket and cultural catalyst, agriculture, is a major contributor to soil erosion and deforestation. The sequestered beauty and affordable land prices of the region attract outsiders who threaten and are threatened by its way of life. Heasley reminds us that "private land always has public dimensions" and that "property rights are contingent ... on ... social context." And as she chronicles the landmark 1930s and 1940s Coon Valley contour farming project, the unsettling 1960s Amish settlement at Cashton, and the 1970s abortion of the 8,500-acre La Farge Dam flood control scheme, the author shows us how property, while often a pain in the ass, can still be "a primary, even sacred, idea in our culture." Which may help explain why people have been willing to shed their own blood over such places as the Golan Heights and Spotsylvania Courthouse.

Looking back, Heasley refrains from harsh historical judgments. Looking ahead, she eschews simple solutions to complex problems. She believes that the more inclusive the considerations of the community, the better chance we all have of achieving what conservationist Gifford Pinchot calls "the greatest good of the greatest number over the longest time." Painstaking in detail and exhaustive in documentation, Heasley also proves adept at pulling the reader back to see the bigger picture in the sometimes tortured Kickapoo tapestry. It is one that includes bigotry and betrayal, shattered dreams and broken promises, and the rapine of women as well as real estate.

A Thousand Pieces of Paradise contains as many switchbacks and surprises as the Kickapoo River itself. Ironies abound. The peace-loving Amish take out the soil-saving contour strips that took years for previous farmers to establish. "Come-here" beef ranchers put cattle back into erosion-prone forests. The dam project degenerates into a bitter standoff between such strange bedfellows as the Army Corps of Engineers and local residents on one side and state politicians and the emerging environmental community on the other.

The dramatic saga of the La Farge Dam dates back to August 1935, when the fourth major flood of the 20th century devastated the valley. Construction finally began August 13, 1971, and the dam was three-fourths completed by 1975 when political support evaporated and funding was permanently cut off—just three years before the monumental 1978 flood, one that the dam could have prevented. Debacles like this have left an unabated bitterness in valley residents who feel they have been sold down their own river.

But Heasley, by assigning process a higher value than outcome, remains sanguine about both the past and future of the region. Amid the doomsday rhetoric of advocates on all sides, she finds a happy-ending sense of justice in many of her bleakest stories. Despite fits and starts, the Coon Valley watershed becomes a model for Midwest agriculture. (Wolfgang Hoffman's heavenly green and gold aerial photograph that graces the book's cover is compelling evidence of the wisdom and beauty of the venture.) A crooked realtor gets his comeuppance. The once-despised Amish, who today own more than half the real estate in one 600-square-mile township, bring a measure of sanity and sanctity—not to mention financial viability—to a dwindling farm economy. And the dam that was never to be strangely enough does accomplish much of what it was intended to do.

What have we done to the land? What will we do to the land? Heasley challenges us to face such questions in the light of its tangible and intangible value, and in terms of competing—and sometimes compatible—individual and collective interests, always with a sense of the perceived fragility and mutability of our landscape.

But in considering that fragility and mutability, I am also forced to reflect on what the land has done and will do to us. "She is unbelievably rigid," writes Texas poet Jessica Spradling. "It is we who can be scratched out."

Review by Mike O'Connell

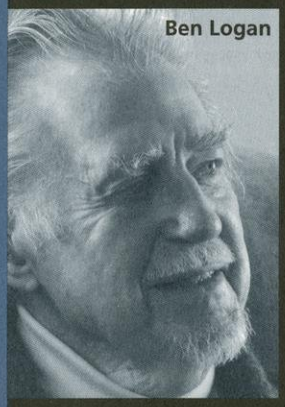
Mike O'Connell is a farmer and teacher in Baraboo.

A "Dairyland Contour Plowing Contest," La Crosse, 1941.

Photo courtesy UW–Madison Archives

The Man from Seldom Seen

A fresh edition of Ben Logan's classic includes a new afterword and works by Wisconsin illustrators


Ben Logan

Ben Logan wrote the classic American memoir *The Land Remembers: The Story of a Farm and Its People* about growing up on a hilltop farm in southwestern Wisconsin. A recently published edition, the book's eighth, includes a new afterword with chapters that trace the land to an earlier time and bring the story full circle back to the farm.

After a successful media career in New York, Logan returned to his childhood farm, Seldom Seen, in the mid-1980s. He continues his love affair with the land and shares that connection with an appreciative public. On Sunday, April 29 at 2 pm, Logan will give a talk at the Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery as part of the exhibition, "Wisconsin's People on the Land" (see page 31). The gallery will offer both the new edition of Logan's book as well as an audio CD (abridged version) for sale during the run of the exhibition.

Fittingly, the new edition has a strong Wisconsin connection. A watercolor cover by Steven Kozar of Stoughton captures a family farm; illustrations by Curt Carpenter (MFA, UW–Madison) evoke the Driftless area; and publisher Itchy Cat Press is located in Blue Mounds (its owners also graduated from the UW–Madison art department).

"The birth of the land, like the birth of the planet, is beyond our comprehension," writes Logan. "We can theorize about cosmic dust, planetary collisions, rivers of molten rock, land rising out of the sea to be worn down again by winds and water, but how real is all that compared to the feel of the morning sun on the face, the smell of the seasons changing, the sight of the new green springing from the soil?"

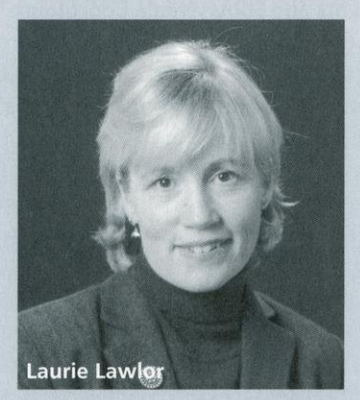
The new edition allows Logan's longtime devotees to enjoy his words with renewed appreciation and provides an aesthetically beautiful introduction to his work for a new generation of readers.

For Birders and Booklovers

People will flock to the golden sands region of Wisconsin April 21–22 for the second Central Wisconsin Prairie Chicken Festival: A Celebration of Grasslands for Birders & Bookies. This Earth Day weekend features new opportunities to explore the landscape and habitat of the state's threatened Greater Prairie Chicken as well as literature and art with an environmental theme.

For the Prairie Chicken Festival weekend, a wristband fee at any of the five locations gives access to all venues for both days. Events include:

- Birding experiences at Buena Vista Wildlife Area in Bancroft and Paul Olson Wildlife Area in Rudolph and other central sites from 4:30–9:30 am each day. Early registration strongly recommended for any of the viewing experiences in a blind, which require a special fee.
- Birding tours and wildlife management demonstrations at George W. Mead Wildlife Area in Milladore as well as crafts for children and poet/author readings on Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm
- Sunday only from 9 am to 2 pm includes auto tours and wildlife talks. Whooping crane and other species will be highlighted at two locations: Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and Sandhill Wildlife Refuge in Babcock. Necedah highlights state winners of youth art and writing contests, and Sandhill offers readings from the late Hazel Grange's *Live Arrival Guaranteed.*
- On Saturday, the Wisconsin Center for the Book hosts the third Wisconsin Literary Bash, where writers and poets read and sign their books. Publishers include Wisconsin Historical Society Press, University of Wisconsin Press, Itchy Cat Press, Home Brew Press, and Woodland Pattern Book Center. The event takes place at the Mead Wildlife Area's Stanton W. Mead Education & Visitor Center in Milladore. Authors include Mary Bergin, Justin Isherwood, and Laurie Lawlor. Twenty percent of book and art sales during the weekend benefit WCB.


Laurie Lawlor

This event is the result of coordination by the Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. and Wisconsin Center for the Book, which is affiliated with the Library of Congress and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. A complete list of supporters may be viewed at www.goldensandsrcd.org.

Contact for Prairie Chicken Festival: Sharon Schwab, tel. 715/343-6221, SchwabS@co.portage.wi.us. Contact for Wisconsin Literary Bash: Mary "Casey" Martin, cell 715/459-4322, casey@homebrewpress.com.

Capital Culture

For the past 30 years, the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission has made culture bloom in and around Wisconsin's capital. The governmental arts and historical agency this year will award more than $485,000 to a large number of individual artists and such vibrant groups as the Madison Symphony Orchestra, the Stoughton Opera Company, the Mazomanie Historical Society, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, to name a few.

That's not bad for an agency that started out in a basement storage room with $5,000 left over from Dane County's bicentennial observance funds. And this spring, while marking its 30th anniversary, the agency will observe another milestone: Lynne Watrous Eich, the woman who nurtured and grew the agency literally from the ground up as its first and only director, will be moving on to an exceptionally well earned retirement.

"I will miss all of it, the work, the people, the creative aspects of it," says Eich. "I'm fortunate to have been in my dream job and to have had the opportunity to work quietly behind the scenes, helping groups fulfill their goals and helping people solve a problem. It's just an immensely satisfying and privileged place to be."

Although it was a bittersweet decision, Eich admits, "This felt like a good time to do it. Three decades is enough. And I've always wanted to retire in the spring so that I could step out and enjoy the sunshine."

She will be dearly missed. Says Kathleen Falk, Dane County executive and commission overseer, "Under Lynne's leadership, the Cultural Affairs Commission has created significant traditions such as the wildly popular annual posters and calendars that celebrate our great county's farms, natural resources, culture, and historical roots."

Stephen Fleischman, director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, adds, "Lynne is a real advocate for the arts throughout Dane County. She has carefully grown the organization and enjoys respect in both the arts and funding communities."

Eich recently was recognized for her decades of arts advocacy with the first-ever governor's award for lifetime achievement by an arts administrator.

Eich says she plans to spend her retirement "sleeping, traveling, spending time with friends, enjoying the outdoors," and visiting her three "grandbabies" in Massachusetts.

But some arts leaders happily doubt that Eich will be able to walk away completely.

Richard Mackie, executive director of the Madison Symphony Orchestra, says, "We of course are sorry that Lynne won't be there in the future. The relationship has been so terrific that we hate to see it end. But I know Lynne isn't retiring from advocacy in the arts, she's just retiring from this role."

An exhibition of the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission's annual posters received much attention earlier this spring in the second-floor community gallery at Madison's Overture Center for the Arts. The exhibition marked one of Eich's final projects as director.

Photo by Zane Williams

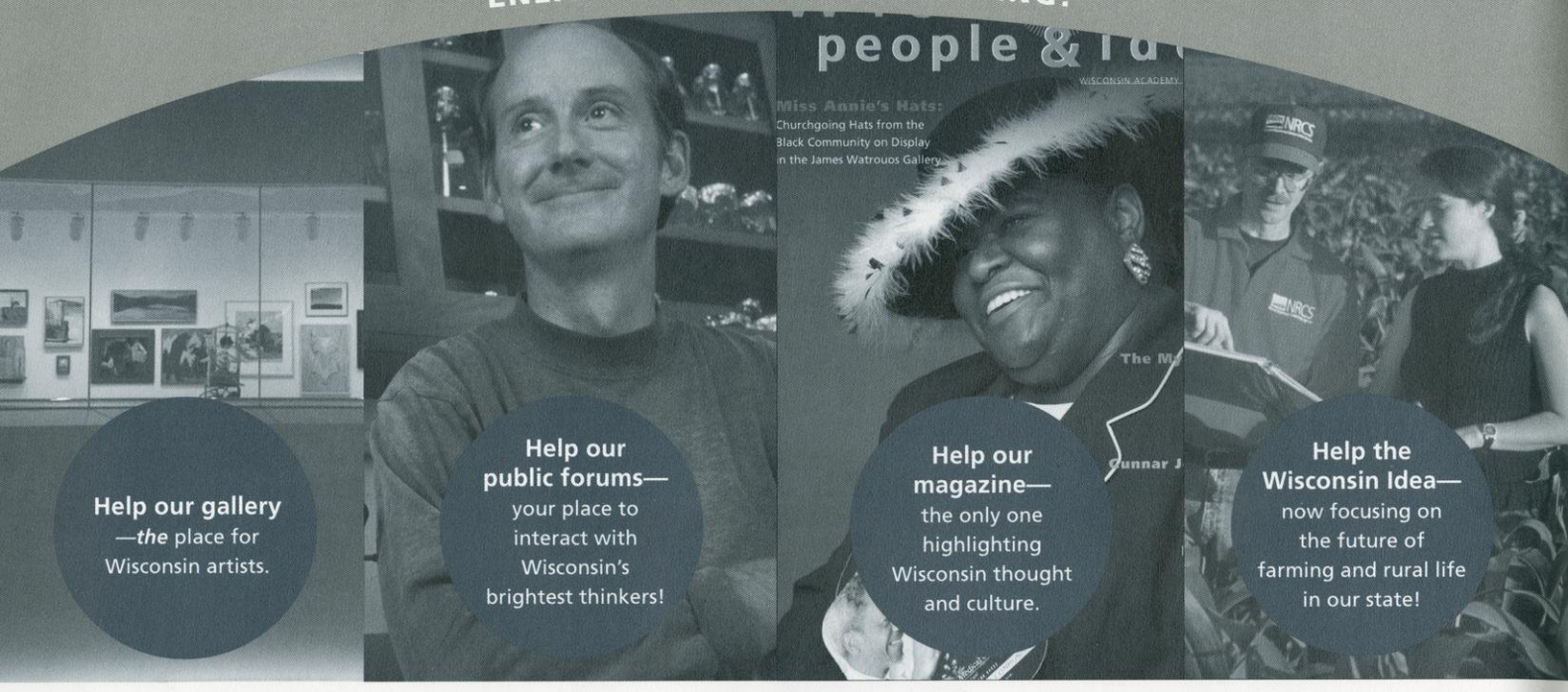
Eich will continue to hold a very special place at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters: our art gallery in Overture is named after her father, James Watrous.

by Shelby Deering

People love the posters. Below, Steven Kozar's *Winding Road*, the 2007 selection (watercolor on paper).

(Right) Lynne Eich is retiring, but she is sure to remain active in the arts scene.

ENLIGHTEN YOUR LIFE BY GIVING!



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The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters connects people and ideas from all areas of knowledge and all walks of life to celebrate thought, culture, and nature in our state and help solve our common problems. We offer solid information straight from the source in all fields of human inquiry and provide a community where citizens and experts can exchange ideas.

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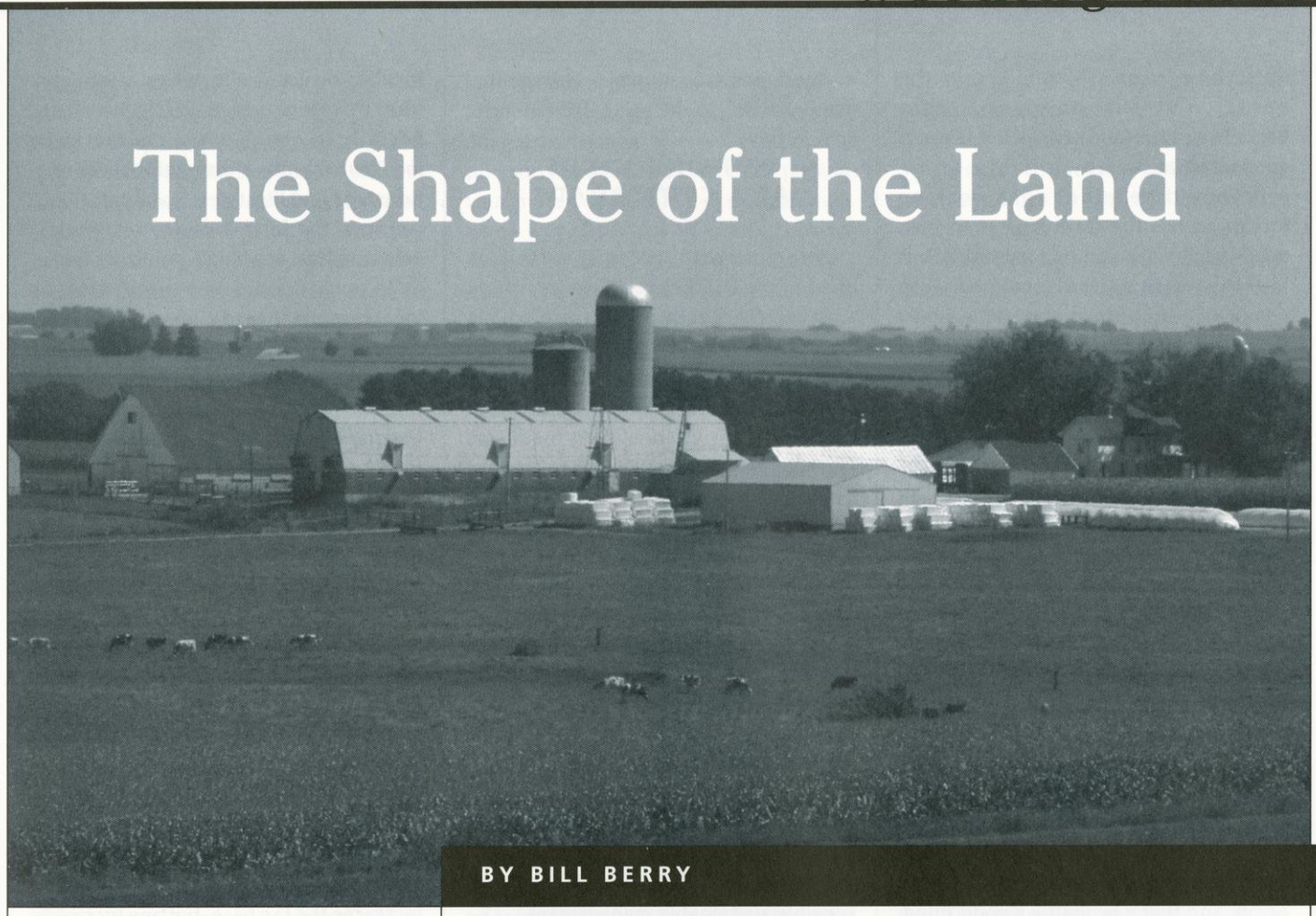
The Shape of the Land



BY BILL BERRY

Photos by Bill Berry

WHEN THE TOPIC TURNS TO WORKING LANDS and how they are used, it's as big as a whole country and as small as a 40-acre farm field in Wisconsin.

Check that. It's bigger than a whole country and as small as a particle of prime Wisconsin soil. Imagine for a moment a few possible futures for that particle.

It could end up staying right where it is, and through careful tending with wise agricultural and conservation practices be productive and one small but essential part of a healthy farming system for, well, as long as we are willing to agree that working lands are worth preserving, protecting, and nurturing.

Then again, poor farming practices could lead to erosion that might dislodge the particle from that farm field and send it to a waterway, possibly carrying with it nutrients and chemicals used to raise crops. The resulting sedimentation might cause water quality problems locally. Those hitchhiking partners might travel all the way down the Mississippi River and into the Gulf of Mexico, contributing to a dead zone devoid of oxygen and fatal to aquatic life in one of America's richest fishing grounds.

That same particle might also end up being compacted with like of its kind, leveled as flat as a pool table and trapped in a subdivision of houses on what was once that 40-acre farm field. That kind of crop grows but once, ruralists say with rue.

Which scenario seems best for the particle, the state, the nation, the world? Yes, it's a big deal, the future of one soil particle on a farm field. This, then, is a case for making wise decisions

about how we as a society handle the question of what happens to that particle and the land to which it is interconnected, as are we.

It should be added that working forests across the state offer their own set of challenges and opportunities, but together with agricultural property comprise our portfolio of working lands. Working forests are susceptible to some of the same pressures as farmland, not the least of which is loss to other uses, especially development. Attention to all of Wisconsin's working lands is of abiding importance to our future.

I used to drive down country lanes and mourn the changes as dairy farms folded up one by one, leaving weathered barns, rusting machinery, and crumbling silos standing like frozen guards. But there is no need to be too sentimental about all of this.

The fact of the matter is that most of the Wisconsin countryside has been altered by humans since the earliest of days of our arrival. The practical question, then, is what to do now? Growth and development will continue to occur, and that's probably a good thing. But in the process, do we allow our best working lands to be carved up willy-nilly, sacrificing all sorts of cultural, social, economic, and ecological benefits?

WORKING LANDS AT A CROSSROADS

Dale Bosworth, recently retired as chief of the USDA Forest Service, would say no. He has made it one of his mantras to identify the loss of open space as a major threat across the country. America, the vast frontier of earlier centuries, has been losing its heritage. More than 21.8 million acres of open space were lost to development between 1982 and 1997. That's about 4,000 acres per day. The rate of loss is accelerating, too, according to the Forest Service.

Here in Wisconsin, we have lost 4.6 million acres of farmland since 1970, and while we still have 14 million acres, much of that is threatened. Wisconsin's forested land base has actually been growing—to about 14.5 million acres today—but it is enduring fragmentation into small parcels at an unprecedented rate that often leads to a lack of any sensible sustainable management.

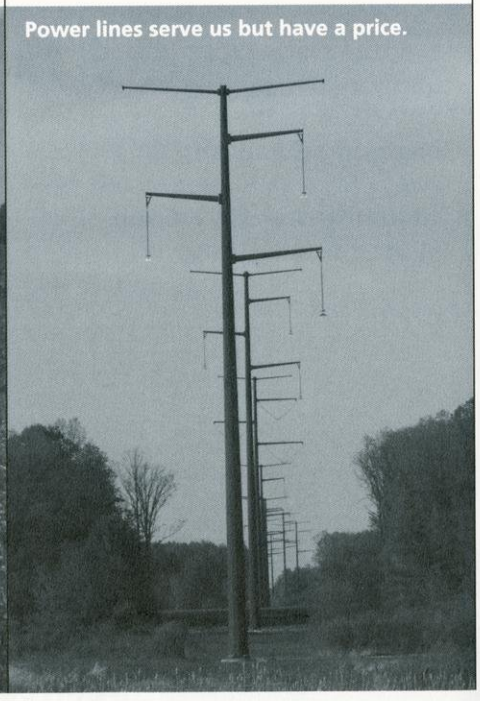
This relentless conversion of working lands to other uses brings with it serious consequences, says Bosworth. He notes: "Ecologically, it can change local hydrology, alter vegetation, and sharply degrade wildlife habitat. Socially, it changes the character of local communities, disrupting rural relationships and lifestyles. Economically, it reduces the land area for producing commodities, supporting outdoor recreation opportunities and contributing to local resource-based economies."

All of which reminds me of what my old boss at the Stevens Point *Journal* used to say. Editor and publisher George Rogers would often comment that he couldn't remember a single example of where more development lowered anybody's taxes. Being conservation-minded, he would quickly add that it didn't do much for the countryside, either.

George would get no argument from Keith Langenhahn, a Marathon County dairy farmer. Speaking at a Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin forum held by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in Wausau last fall, Langenhahn didn't hold back: "We all pay for this urban sprawl," he said. "Many taxpayers think development increases the tax base, but any increases are swallowed up by development."

This is not some disgruntled rural agitator hollering into a bullhorn. He is the immediate past president of the

Wisconsin's farmlands are rich in ongoing research.



Power lines serve us but have a price.

Wisconsin Counties Association and chair of the Marathon County Board of Supervisors. A strapping man with a gentlemanly demeanor, Langenhahn is among a growing group of rural voices calling for preservation of working lands and Wisconsin's rural roots. Sentimentality may have something to do with it for a guy whose family has farmed the same land for almost 130 years, but on a practical level, that same land has sustained his family and provided something of value to society along the way. To wit: Agriculture contributes $28.6 billion in direct economic activity to the state each year and the forest products industry about $22.9 billion.

Langenhahn was among a group of about 50 state residents who toured three eastern states last fall to study land use practices that preserve agricultural lands. He came back a believer in the ability to accomplish preservation. He recalled for the audience in Wausau a lesson on one stop during the tour: "One of the towns out east calculated that for every dollar taken in for residential development, it costs $1.32 in services. Every dollar for agricultural land costs 7 cents in services."

The eastern tour was presented by the American Farmland Trust, a group that works to stop the loss of productive farmland and promote healthy farming practices in the United States. On a hot day last June, AFT's Anita Zurbrugg was speaking to a roomful of people at the Oconomowoc Lake Club during another of the Future of Farming and Rural Life forums. The topic was as hot as the weather: land use in the rural-urban interface.

"The majority of working land in the United States is rented," Zurbrugg noted. "It's not something the public always realizes, but the producer is often not the owner of the land being worked." The general public may not know this, but it's common knowledge out in the countryside. Ask any farmer what the average rental rate is on land in his or her township and you're likely to get an accurate answer.

Add the land-rent trend to the fact that in working lands settings, the age of landowners is going up, and you have a formula for change. It's especially acute near urban areas, where development pressures are intense. "An aging population means that there are challenges about transition of ownership," Zurbrugg said. "When land changes ownership from a person who is dying or changing estates, that is an ideal time for land to change ownership to another identity other than agriculture. Oftentimes, this is when development comes in."

Linda Bochert learned that lesson over the past few years. Bochert was there in Oconomowoc as co-chair of the forum. The Madison attorney (of Michael Best & Friedrich) also co-chaired the Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative Steering Committee, a group of some of the best minds in the state, which spent two years studying Wisconsin's working lands before coming up with a set of recommendations on how to preserve them.

Bochert sums up transition of ownership issues for agricultural working lands with a few terse words: "If you address end-of-life issues for farmers, you will go a long way to addressing issues of land use."

Put another way, perhaps for an urban dweller, her point is that a farmer's land is often his or her individual retirement account. Especially if there is no family member to assume ownership, the farmer is in a corner when it comes to late-life issues that affect all of us.

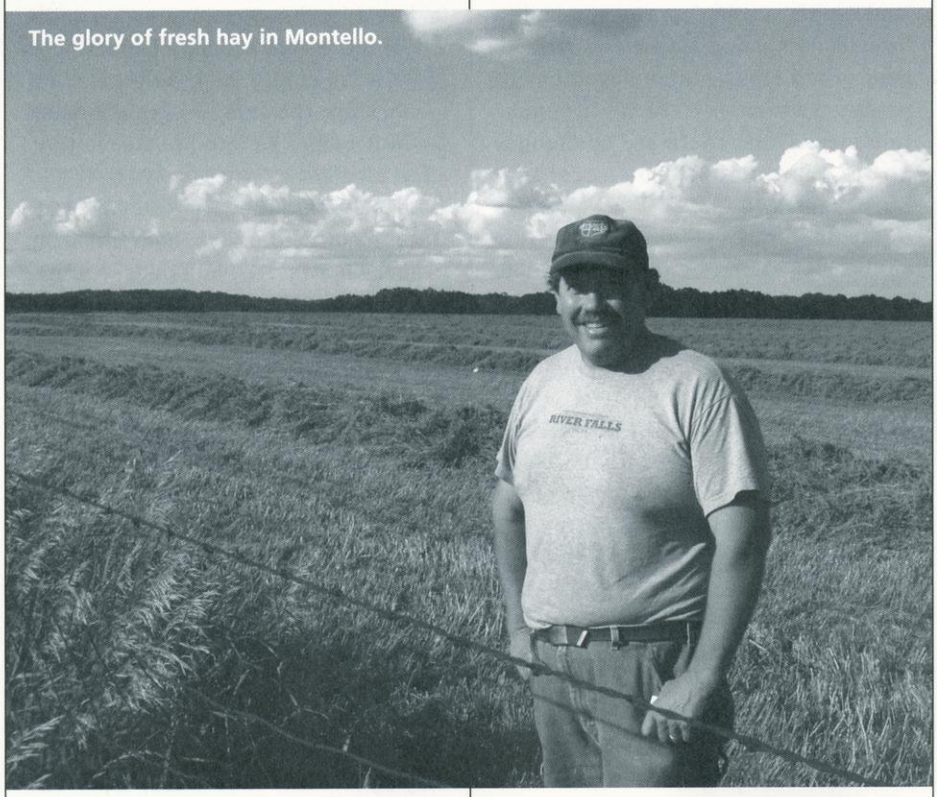
At this point, the farm can get tired. Once the owner decides that retirement is near, there's often slippage. A fresh coat of paint for the barn, updates to equipment, investments in conservation and other sustainable practices may no longer make financial sense. You can almost see the fresh white concrete of new subdivision roads even before the first house is erected.

STEPS TOWARD PRESERVATION

So, then, how do we address these end-of-life issues to which Bochert refers? First, we must come to an agreement that Wisconsin's working lands, be they agricultural or forested, are worth preserving for reasons that are important to rural and urban residents alike.

At a recent meeting, state forester Paul DeLong called this "the confluence of where public good meets self-interest." He added, "As land goes, so goes community," and stressed that it's important to show people how land use

A sentiment not shared by all.



The glory of fresh hay in Montello.

affects a variety of other interests. These might range from quantifiable ecological services such as sequestration of greenhouse gases and protecting water to the aesthetic value of open space that so pleases the eye of a Sunday driver from the city.

Then, we must find ways to ease the retirement crunch for farmers. A number of states across the country have done this with purchase of development rights (PDR) programs of one sort or another. In a nutshell, these programs pay farmers for the development rights to their properties in return for an easement that says the land will be farmed in perpetuity. It's important to note that these are voluntary measures and result in the sale of only one of many property rights held by the landowner.

The practical effects of PDR programs when they work right is that farmland is preserved and farmer retirement issues are addressed. These development rights are valuable, and the farmer receives what amounts to a tidy advance on his or her retirement account.

Later, when it comes time to retire and sell the farm, he or she can collect the remaining value of the property. In the east, where people like Keith Langenhahn spent six days of study, the value of PDR property has continued to increase, so that at sale time a nice profit can be had and every particle of soil on the land can continue to be worked.

But is Wisconsin ready to take steps like this? Are state residents willing to say that preserving private working lands is worth the public investment?

Two points are worth making to answer those questions.

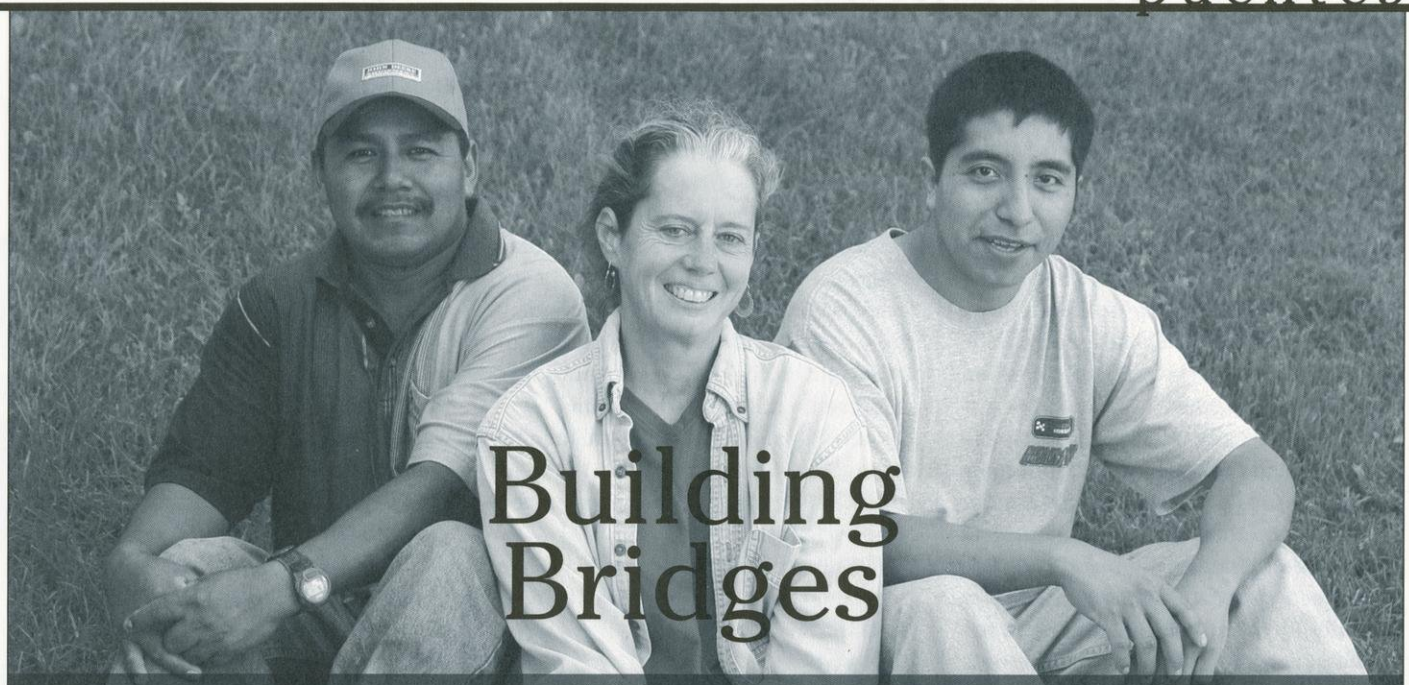
First, there is precedent for undertaking such efforts. History shows that people of vision have stepped up to address landscape-scale issues in Wisconsin. After the rapacious timber harvests of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, northern Wisconsin was a wasteland. Agriculture was tried but failed. State leaders soon came to agree with University of Wisconsin–Madison land economist George Wehrwein, who had two ideas for the vast northern lands. One was that they should be reforested whenever possible; the other was that the north held great value for recreation. Wehrwein and a cadre of state leaders took steps in the early 20th century to make useful the thousands of acres of denuded, tax-delinquent land in the north.

They established county zoning, the first such example of rural land use zoning in the nation. Some forested land was shifted to state and national reserves. A county forest program was developed as a way to get tax-delinquent land back into productive use, and a forest crop taxation program was devised to encourage continued private ownership and management of forests. Today, the north is again witnessing challenges to its forest base, but the efforts of Wehrwein and others served Wisconsin well for nearly a century.

As for taking big steps today to preserve our working lands and the heritage that attaches to them, Keith Langenhahn hopes we don't wait too long to take meaningful steps.

"I feel very strongly that Wisconsin has to do something," he says. "We don't have a lot of time to study. We have to do some cramming." ✹

Bill Berry is a communications specialist with the Wisconsin Academy's Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin initiative, which culminates in a statewide forum in Madison May 14–15. His "Field Notes" column has kept readers informed about the initiative over the past few issues of ***Wisconsin People & Ideas****, and he is serving as guest co-editor of this special edition. He welcomes your comments at billnick@charter.net.*



Building Bridges

An innovative program called Puentes—Spanish for "bridges"—helps Wisconsin dairy farmers and the Mexicans who work for them meet across the barriers of language and culture.

BY DEBORAH KADES

Puentes founder Shaun Judge Duvall (center) with Gregorio (left) and Eusebio at the Rosenholm-Wolfe Dairy in Waumandee.

Wisconsin photos by John Urban
Photos from Mexico courtesy of John Rosenow

ON A HAZY MORNING IN AUGUST, Daniel is going up and down the two rows of Holstein dairy cows, seemingly effortlessly wiping the teats clean and hooking up the milking machine. A baseball hat is pulled low over his eyes, and he doesn't even stop to wipe the perspiration off his face.

Say hello to the new face of dairy farming.

At 25, Daniel is a husband and father; his wife and daughter live in southern Mexico, from where he hails. He is here in tiny Waumandee, in west-central Wisconsin, for one reason: He can earn a living wage.

Daniel is just one of the Mexican workers who have come north of the border to fill the agricultural jobs that are no longer drawing native-born Americans.

Dairy farming is especially demanding work. The cows are there every day, needing food, water, and milking. In response, workers are coming from parts of Mexico where poverty rules and jobs are nearly impossible to find. They bring with them a strong work ethic and devotion to their families back home. They also carry with them the values and traditions of a rural, agrarian society that is very different from modern America.

That's where Puentes comes in.

Puentes, the Spanish word for bridges, is integral to the success of a Mexican workforce on the Rosenholm-Wolfe Dairy, where Daniel works, says John Rosenow, one of the three partners in this 1,100-cow farm.

The six-year-old program was established by Shaun Judge Duvall, who was teaching Spanish at Alma High School when she was approached by Buffalo County University of Wisconsin–Extension agent Carl Duley. As the local labor force dried up, farmers had begun hiring workers from Mexico. Duley thought Duvall might be able to help the two groups close the gap between English and Spanish.

As Duvall began working with the farmers and their employees, it became clear to her that there was a huge cultural gap that went beyond different languages. Relationships and manners between supervisors in Mexico differ markedly from the conventions in the United States—and the disconnect was causing unnecessary bad feelings.

So, in 1999, the energetic Duvall established Puentes to provide cultural and language training. In 2004, she left teaching to devote all her energies to the nonprofit organization.

Today, Duvall works with about 100 Mexican workers on 30 farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. She conducts regularly scheduled visits and stops at Rosenow's farm every Monday. Over the course of a week, she'll do whatever is needed to provide lessons in language and cultural differences, arrange 10-day visits that take farmers to the Mexican villages where their employees come from, and maintain a training program for future farmers at UW–River Falls.

The program is one of a kind, at least for now. "There may be some similar programs, but none for farmers," says Duley, who was instrumental in creating the program. "There are a couple of universities that have contacted us about setting up similar programs."

While Puentes received initial funding from the Babcock Institute at UW–Madison, it has always operated independently.

"This is a chance to use my skills in a creative way. It's very gratifying," Duvall says.

DOWN ON THE FARM

The Rosenholm-Wolfe Dairy is one of those neat-as-a-pin farms that are found all over the state. Picture-perfect black-and-white Holsteins mingle in the expansive barn; the farm has 550 milk cows and 500 head of young stock. The farm is owned by Rosenow, his wife, Nettie, and neighbor Loren Wolfe. The three also sell composted cow manure.

The cows are milked in a double-nine herringbone parlor. A sunken aisle runs down the center of the parlor so that the milkers don't have to bend to milk. On each side of the aisle are nine angled slots for the cows. In 1989, Rosenow was one of the first farmers in this part of the state to build this type of barn.

Similarly, Rosenow was one of the first farmers in west-central Wisconsin to employ Mexican workers.

It isn't that Rosenow didn't try to find workers in the area. He ran ads but rarely got a response. He tried hiring women, but they would leave as more opportunities opened for them. The last straw came when he hired a longtime area resident.

"Here was a big, strong guy, and he came in and said to me, 'I can't do this. I can't handle the speed. I just can't get the cows milked.'"

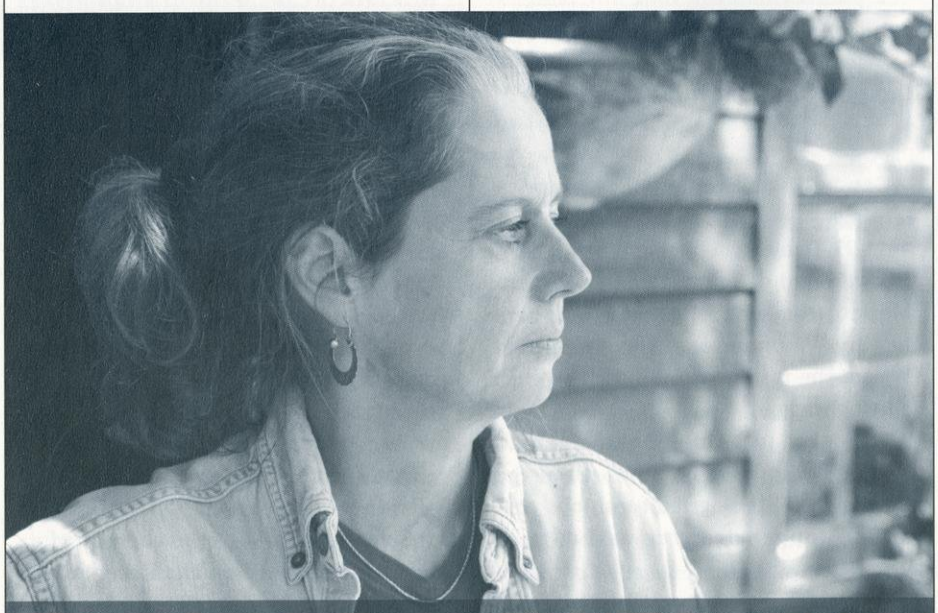
At the end of his rope, Rosenow called a farmer friend in Minnesota who had been employing workers from Mexico. A few days later, Rosenow picked up Manuel from the bus station in Winona. It didn't take long for Rosenow to appreciate his new employee.

"He came and worked from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. He wanted to work 10 hours a day, seven days a week. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven," Rosenow says. "The only people with that work ethic are me and the other partners."

With a degree in agricultural economics from UW–River Falls, Rosenow is a pretty expensive milker. "I can't afford to milk," he says. Over the years, the partners have tried to spend their work time on management tasks that can't be allotted to hired help.

Early on Rosenow attracted some Latino men who had been working on a Christmas tree farm, including Roberto, who became the source of labor for most of this part of the state. Now Rosenow is the go-to guy for farmers in need of milkers.

"People call me looking for Mexican workers. A day or two later, they're there," says Rosenow, 56, a tall and hardy man with tousled hair and a ready smile. Dressed in his daily uniform of Dickies overalls, a baseball hat embossed with the logo for Select Sires, and high rubber boots, he looks like a farmer from central casting.



"We know so little about the rest of the world and they know so little about us," says Duvall, who aims to change that situation with her program.

At any given time about half of the 18 employees on the farm hail from Mexico. They range from 15 or 16 years old to men in their 40s, though he has not had any workers older than 50. The workers on Rosenow's farm are all men, although some farms have women. Most workers leave their children in Mexico, though a few do bring them along.

They consider dairy farming a higher form of work than many of the other jobs available, such as picking fruit, a seasonal job that involves lots of moving. Coming from a remote rural area in the Mexican state of Veracruz, they are accustomed to working with hogs and sheep; milking cows is a comfortable task for them.

The Mexicans work six-day weeks, and many would like to work all seven. "They're here to work. If you don't give them enough hours, they'll find a different job," Rosenow says.

CULTURAL CHASM

Communicating across a language divide remains the No. 1 challenge for farmers employing Mexicans, says Shaun Duvall, and she spends a good chunk of her time helping people communicate.

"Our employees are here for up to four years," Rosenow says. "Most have six years of education. Learning English is difficult for them. It's not something they just pick up." As a result, Rosenow has worked hard to improve his Spanish.

There are other differences that come from the culture in Veracruz. "They have a very hierarchical culture. They don't want to displease," Duvall says. Mexican workers are likely to reply in the affirmative to any question from a boss, whether or not they agree or understand.

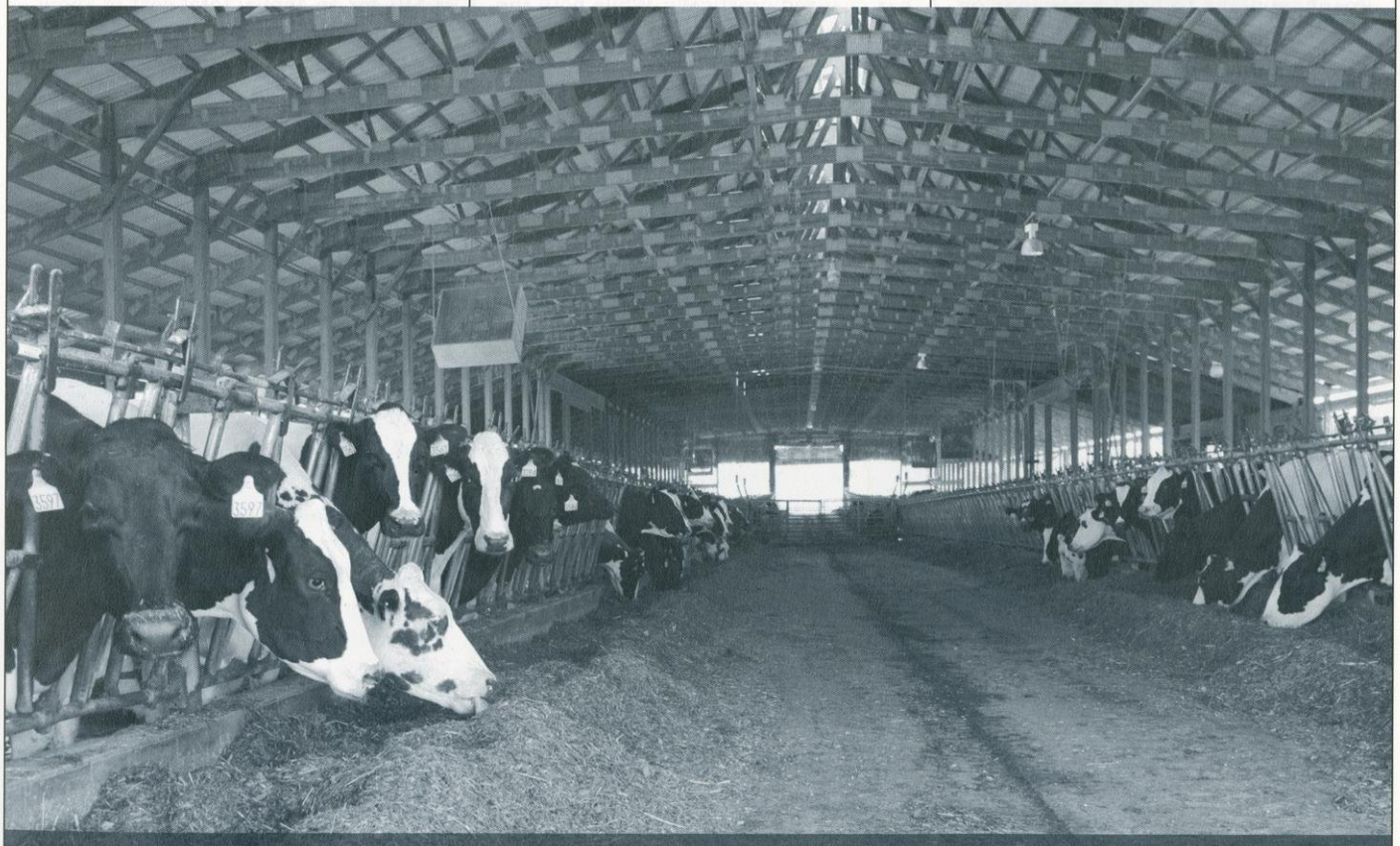
In Veracruz, most people look to family and a boss, or patron, for help and protection. "If we think our families are important to us, we have to multiply that by 20 for them," Duvall says. "Family is the only source of support and protection for them."

The Mexican government provides virtually nothing in goods or services to the native people of Veracruz, according to Duvall. "The government has never really cared about the Indians, not since the Spanish came," she says.

"Who's the best boss? For these men, it's someone who tends to their needs and wants, not necessarily someone who pays the most," Duvall says. Rosenow is a good patron, she says. "I've seen guys take a pay cut to work here."

Rosenow offers his workers housing, training, a schedule they can count on, regular raises, and responsibility, all things that matter to this workforce. "Uncertainty is really, really hard for these guys," Duvall says. "They can be very unhappy working at higher wages but with less clarity."

A key part of Puentes are the trips by U.S. farmers to Veracruz, east of Mexico City along the coast of the Gulf of



Rosenow's farm offers state-of-the-art facilities for farm employees and the animals they tend. He was one of the first farmers in his area to employ Mexican workers.

Mexico. Three villages in the region are home to most of the Mexican workers employed in the U.S. area served by Puentes. Rosenow has traveled there with Puentes four times. "I'm able to go to their houses and meet their families. That way I can determine their needs and wants," he says.

"They know that he cares about them. He's like a traditional patron, someone who can help without conditions," Duvall says. Rosenow routinely helps with phone calls, obtaining cars, arranging doctor and dentist appointments, resolving traffic tickets. He even made arrangements with a local bank to allow his employees to transfer money to Mexico for a reasonable cost.

"Some of it is hand-holding," Rosenow says. "They're far away from home; some are very young. It's a difficult time in their lives."

The young men on Wisconsin farms can find themselves in trouble. One area worker drove drunk into a house, killing himself. Sexual activity can be an issue. Rosenow plans to hold a seminar on condom use for the men on his farm. He relies on Puentes to help him navigate these sensitive issues.

DOLLARS AND CENTS

The economics of dairy farming are almost as complex as quantum physics.

Farmers have no control over how much they are paid, Rosenow points out. Instead, the price farmers are paid by milk distributors and cheese makers is determined by a complex and arcane system designed decades ago, before refrigeration allowed milk to be easily and safely transported over long distances.

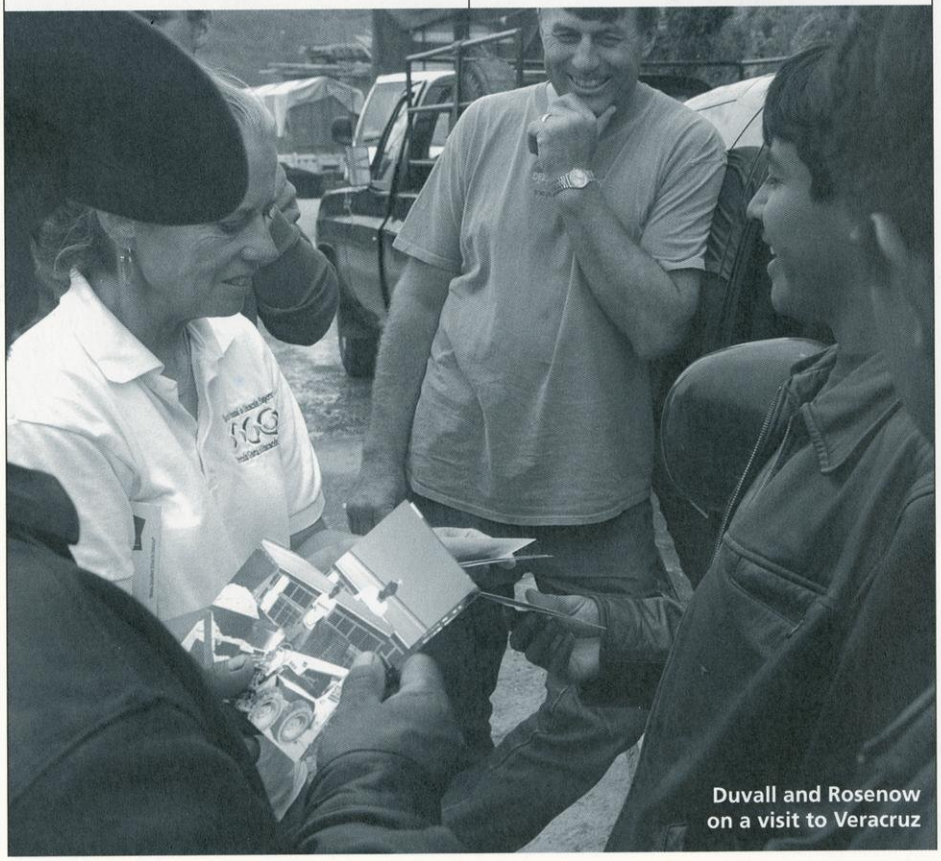
Dairy farming can be risky business. Between the pricing system and unpredictable costs for energy, feed, and fertilizer, dairy farmers never know exactly what to expect from year to year. "Our net income varies by a half-million dollars from year to year," Rosenow says. In 2005, the farm's gross revenues were $2.7 million.

In the last half-century, dairy farming has changed drastically. While both the number of farms and number of cows in the state have been on a long decline, the number of cows per farm has increased. Wisconsin's cow numbers peaked at 2.4 million in the mid-1940s but had declined to 1.2 million in early 2005. However, the average dairy farm in Wisconsin houses 87 cows, up from 47 in 1987.

And when you're milking 550 cows a day, as Rosenow's operation does, you move from small farmer to big businessman. Rosenow no longer milks but spends his time doing the management chores he can't afford to hire out. It takes 44,000 hours of hired labor to run Rosenow's farm, and half of the 16 full-time employees at the farm come from Mexico.

Being fully staffed has changed life drastically for the partners. "We used to average 90 hours a week. We like what we do, but that's a little bit too much," Rosenow says. They now work a comparatively leisurely 70 hours a week.

Workers start at $6.25 an hour, and the average hourly wage at John's farm is $10, for an annual total cost of about $410,000. "What would we have to pay to get Americans to do these jobs?" asks Rosenow. "And is it even possible?"



Duvall and Rosenow on a visit to Veracruz

FROM ACROSS THE BORDER

West-central Wisconsin may not come to mind as a place on the cutting edge of American life, but the injection of Hispanic residents has put it firmly in the center of one of the most explosive issues in the country.

Latinos are estimated to make up about 3 percent of the 2,400 residents of Arcadia, near Waumandee. They come here for good jobs at Ashley Furniture Industries and Gold'n Plump chicken. Both companies have issued statements asserting that all their employees have the required paperwork. Gold'n Plump, which has 500 workers, stated that the company has had more openings than applicants for the last five years.

Are the Mexican farmworkers legally entitled to work in the United States?

"I'm required to get green cards and social security numbers and fill out all the required forms," Rosenow says,

adding that he does collect the required paperwork for all his employees.

UW–Madison dairy economist Bruce Jones points out that workers from south of the border—legal and not—are pervasive in the U.S. economy. "They're all over; they're not unique to dairy farms. Look at the service industry," he says.

Farm labor is tough to find at the prices currently being paid, Jones says. "The willingness of workers to take that pay is a function of their opportunities. The Mexican labor force is looking at limited employment opportunities. What may seem to be a low wage here can be a high wage in the Mexican economy," he says.

The alternative to paying foreign workers would be to mechanize—which is not economically feasible for most farms—or to pay higher wages, Jones says. And, he points out, Americans would have to pay higher prices for their food to support those wages. "To maintain the current labor force, we have to pay more for agricultural commodities. Until that happens, we'll be bringing in people willing to work at rock-bottom wages," he says.

Rosenow is not convinced that he could find sufficient numbers of workers at any wage. He points out that there are 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, according to Homeland Security, but only 7 million unemployed Americans—not enough to replace all undocumented workers in the United States.

Nonetheless, the questions raised by foreign workers have roiled much of the country, including the small city of Arcadia, about a half-hour east of Rosenow's farm. In August 2006, American and foreign-born residents there were startled when barowner and mayor John Kimmel announced in a letter to the weekly *News-Letter* newspaper that he wanted to create an illegal alien task force to crack down on people who employ or rent to illegal immigrants, alert federal officials to illegal immigration, designate English the official language of Arcadia, and regulate the use of foreign flags.

Kimmel's proposal came on the heels of an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit against Hazelton, Pa., which approved similar ordinances. In the wake of national attention and a local uproar, Kimmel withdrew the proposed ordinance in mid-September with the support of the city council.

The Mexican workers are good for the area, Rosenow says. "They are revitalizing a rural area. They shop here, participate in the community," he says, adding that resistance to immigrants is nothing new. "When you have a new group, it doesn't blend for a while, for at least a generation," he says.

Although the issues around Mexican immigrants are often played out in stark black-and-white terms in the press, the issue is complex and nuanced, Duvall says. "If we are going to make a just and humane policy, we'd say, 'How many people do we need?'" Our system should

Sending the money back home: A typical village in Veracruz, Mexico

allow the number of needed workers to cross the border legally, she says.

A DEEPENING PARTNERSHIP

For Puentes, the focus is on individuals, a grassroots approach to building relationships that benefit people and communities on both sides of the border. Taking U.S. farmers to Veracruz has been a key part of that, Duvall says. The farmers learn about the culture that their workers come from and meet the families that the employees work so hard for. On a visit to Veracruz, Rosenow held the newborn son of one worker before that father had seen the baby.

The strength of the ties between employer and employee have prompted Puentes farmers to think about how to build a stronger economy in Veracruz. "Some of our workers want the ability to stay in Mexico and not be away from family," Rosenow says. "We thought it would make sense to go to Mexico and see if that was possible."

On an August 2006 trip, Duvall and Rosenow explored business ventures made possible by the dairy dollars sent home from Wisconsin. "Right now there's a huge building boom, with people using the dollars from the United States to build houses," he says. "Once that's done, they'll have capital for something else."

That something else could include establishing a coffee-growers cooperative that would sell high-end beans, or a program to teach English as a second language. Knowing even a little English will boost an individual worker's employability in either Mexico or the United States.

In addition, Duvall is thinking about putting together a book to document the program. "This is a unique relationship between Veracruz and these farmers. It could help people understand the complexities of immigration," she says.

Understanding is at the core of Puentes, she says.

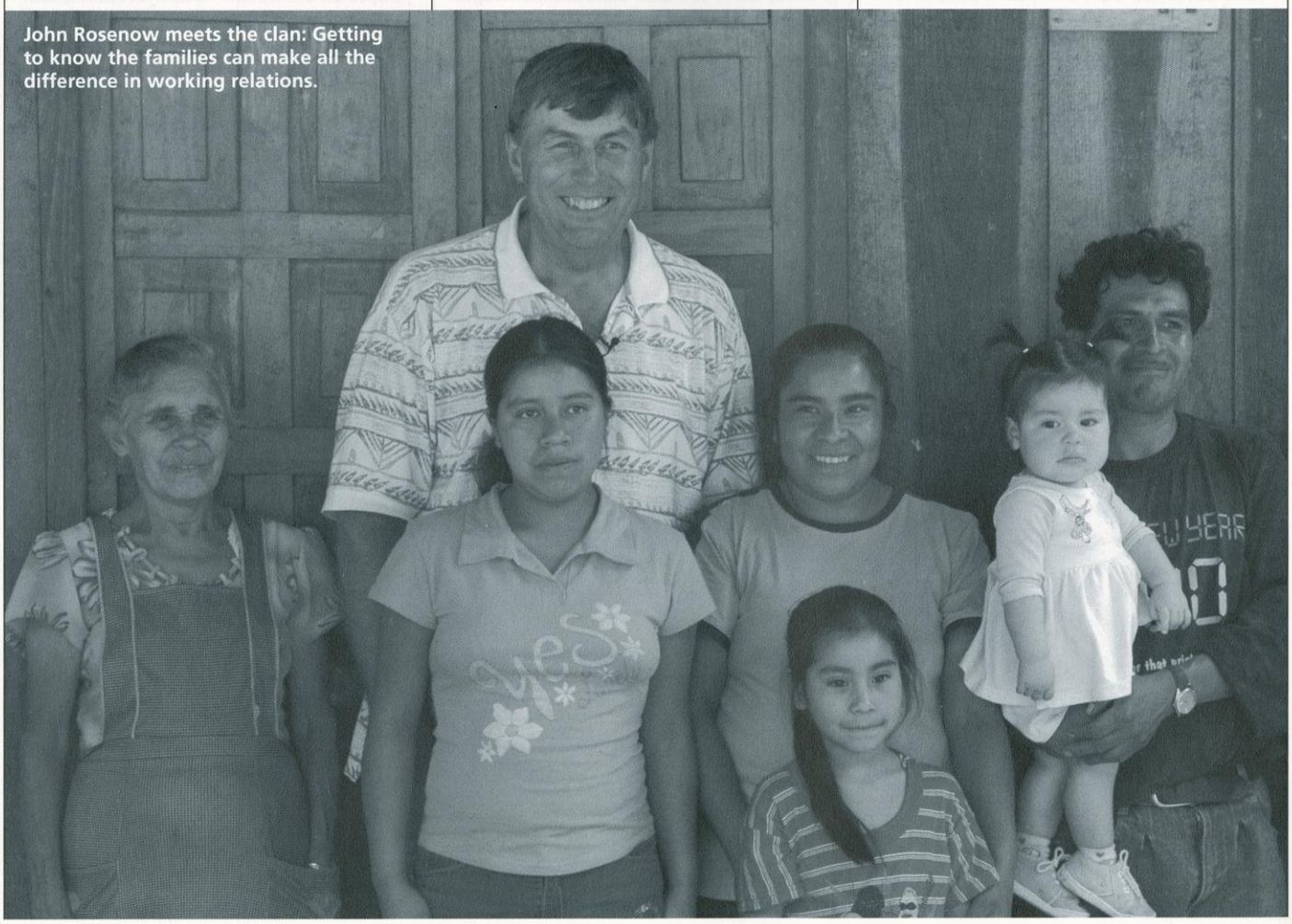
"We know so little about the rest of the world and they know so little about us. So it's natural that there is misunderstanding," Duvall says.

Person by person, farm by farm, and village by village, Puentes is doing what it can to fill that gap. ✹

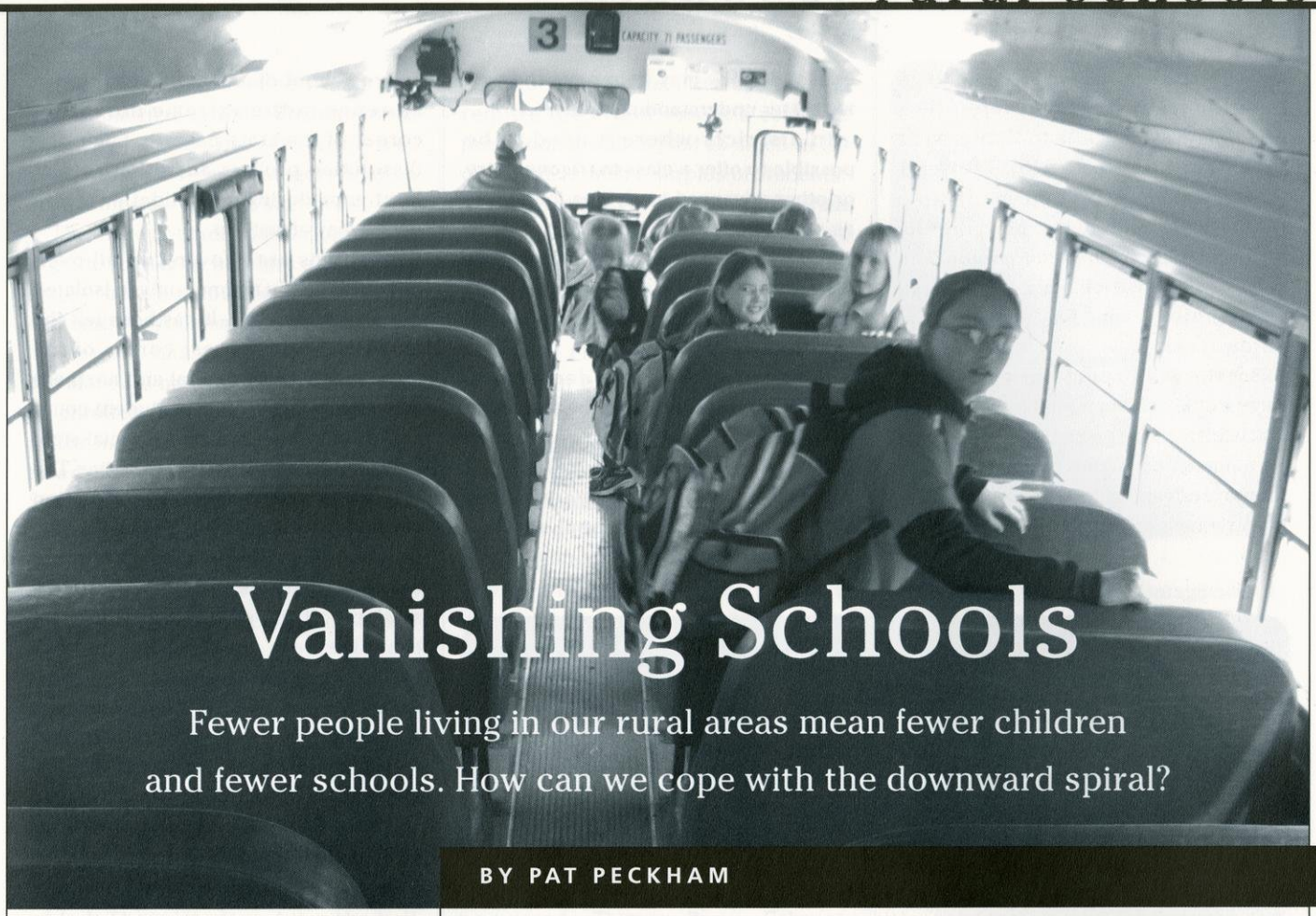
Deborah Kades is a freelance writer and historian in Madison.

An Evening with Puentes!

Shaun Judge Duvall, John Rosenow, and Carl Duley will talk about Puentes as part of the Wisconsin Academy's Academy Evening series on Tuesday, May 8, 7–8:30 pm at the Overture Center in Madison, 201 State Street. More info on page 43.



John Rosenow meets the clan: Getting to know the families can make all the difference in working relations.



Vanishing Schools

Fewer people living in our rural areas mean fewer children and fewer schools. How can we cope with the downward spiral?

BY PAT PECKHAM

Photo courtesy of Pat Peckham

IT IS WITH AN AIR OF RESIGNATION that retired Birnamwood Elementary School secretary Lola Eckert speaks about the loss more than 35 years ago of the junior high and high school in a consolidation move. "We always have to run to Wittenberg," Eckert says, mentioning the next village to the south on Highway 45 here in central Wisconsin.

That change was part of consolidations that took place under state pressure in the name of efficiency, but planners assumed at the time that student populations would continue to grow as they had since World War II. Those planners were right for quite a few years, but now many small school districts have shrinking enrollments. Enrollments are going down in more than half of the state's school districts.

The village of Birnamwood hasn't been the same since its school district merged in 1970 with Wittenberg, the larger of the two. Birnamwood retained its elementary school. Since that consolidation, Birnamwood's population has grown by 330 compared to Wittenberg's growth of 473. A rural sociologist in New York studied rural communities with and without schools and found that those with schools had higher populations, property values, and income.

Eckert, a longtime Birnamwood resident and the grade school secretary for 30 years, says she doesn't know if the loss of the high school can be blamed for the slow population growth, but it had another effect. "It took away a lot of the togetherness of people."

Eckert says another factor was that students on the western edge of the

Birnamwood district were opting to go to the newer, bigger D.C. Everest High School in Weston, close to Wausau. The result was the loss of 25 to 30 students out of the 80 to 90 that made up a typical freshman class. Merging the districts became the only real option, and the change took place so long ago that the complaining has gone away, for the most part.

But the word is out these days that rural schools are in a bind in Wisconsin, traceable in large part to declining enrollments occurring in times that call for more advanced instruction and technology. Lessons learned from earlier consolidations may help pave the way for better understanding today.

In districts where it used to be possible to offer a class in trigonometry or other advanced math area for a class as small as 10 students, district decision-makers are trying to find answers other than "no" for the six interested students who might be tomorrow's engineers and scientists.

No alarms went off a decade ago when incremental change began. Many school districts started drifting toward the smallest size category, fewer than 250 students in all the grades from kindergarten to high school seniors. Those alarms are sounding now. When entire school districts like the one in Florence in the extreme northeast corner of the state actually begin the dissolution process and others are at least considering consolidation, more people pay attention.

The signs are showing up all over, more frequently and not only in isolated corners of the state. It has been felt the most in the southwest corner of the state and in north-central and northern Wisconsin. The decline in student count and the subsequent loss of crucial state aid has been steady and pervasive. The state Department of Public Instruction keeps a lot of statistics, but one that is causing increasing concern is the count of school districts with fewer than 250 students. If the students in a district that size were evenly distributed in each grade level, they would have graduating classes of 19 or fewer students each spring.

In 1996, only 21 of the 425 school districts in the state had fewer than 250 students. The count in that category stayed at 21 in 1997, then went to 22 in 1998, inched up to 23 in 1999, and kept

The role of revenue limits

Since 1993, Wisconsin school districts have been under state-imposed revenue limits. Basically, each district is allowed to receive enough money to allow an annual increase of about $257 in per-student revenues. The controls cover how much districts can receive from the combination of state aids and local property taxes. The calculation is based on a three-year average of school population to smooth out the financial effects of enrollment fluctuations. Policy wonks can find more at http://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/revlimex.html.

Ladysmith Middle School students (shown here with state school superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster) sang at a "New Wisconsin Promise" conference earlier this year.

going. There were 40 of those tiny school districts in 2005. The number is back to 34 in 2006, but even that is a 62 percent increase in a category that no school officials are striving toward.

These are not individual school buildings in scattered hamlets around the state. These are entire school districts and entire enrollment size categories.

The very smallest of the districts in the state are not the only ones pinched by enrollment drops, a school administrator in Tomahawk says. Jerry Fiene, head of Cooperative Educational Services Agency (CESA) 9, points to the next district size category, fewer than 500 students. The number of districts in that category went up 19 percent, climbing from 89 districts in 1996 to 106 in 2006.

A scenario with fewer students equals more difficulties for school districts, in part because the student population rarely has the good grace to decrease or increase in a manner that's convenient for school administrators. One class will be a little too large for comfort for a single teacher, so an aide has to be added. The next class down the hall might be smaller than average but still require the attentions of a certified professional who is paid as much as his or her peers with a surplus of students.

Things might get worse in some areas before they get better. Population declines are forecast for 27 counties and increases are forecast for seven counties. Figures presented at a recent Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin forum showed that 21 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are projected to have a school population drop of at least 10 percent. Those predicted to lose the most students are Langlade County with a drop of 20 percent, Bayfield County down 19.6 percent, Taylor County down 19.5 percent, Washburn County down 19.1 percent, and both Lincoln and Wood counties down nearly 18 percent. Lesser drops, but still more than 10 percent, are forecast for Ashland, Buffalo, Columbia, Dodge, Douglas, Fond du Lac, Iowa, Grant, Lafayette, Marquette, Oconto, Polk, Richland, Trempealeau, and Waupaca.

Seven counties are forecast to grow in next decade. They are Brown, Calumet, Clark, Dane, Eau Claire, Outagamie, St. Croix, and Walworth.

School District Sparsity Sampler

District	Students per square mile
Athens	4.3
Bayfield	2.9
Boulder Junction	0.73
Cuba City	8.5
Dodgeville	6.9
Merrill	5.6
New Glarus	10.6
Reedsburg	10.5
Wausau	34.0
West Salem	17.2
Whitefish Bay	1,365.0

Fiene says you know your school district is going in the wrong direction when, as is happening in the most northern of the 12 CESA districts, the kindergarten classes are half the size of the senior classes.

Libby Burmaster, state superintendent of schools, has seen the trend in declining enrollment and knows how the combination of tight finances and declining student numbers can hinder education in those districts. In the Wausau School District, for example, the loss of a single student costs the district $6,134.

Since January 2004, she has made helping rural schools a high priority. Burmaster pushed for the establishment of new relationships and organizations to assist rural schools. Burmaster was a keynote speaker at the Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin forum in Menasha, where she and other speakers put a human side to the flood of numbers. Rural schools in today's world are often the centers of their communities. They are literally the succor of community, the site of everything from sporting events and plays to bake sales and band concerts.

As for the kids, Burmaster says that with more than half the districts in the state experiencing declines in enrollment, the result is severe financial strains that make it harder for anyone to say that a student in Wisconsin will receive an equally good education no

Photo by Bill Berry

Rural schools often are the heart of cultural activities. Here, the Berlin High School Jazz Band gives an outdoor concert.

matter where he or she lives. Things like world languages and higher-level science and math classes are less likely to attract enough students to warrant the expense of in-person instruction.

Fiene says his CESA came up with online classes from around the United States that are offered to small districts through Wisconsin Virtual School, but some districts can't even afford the $325 per-student course fees.

In his CESA 9 service area, which takes in 22 school districts from Mosinee north to the border with Upper Michigan, 18 are rural districts in enrollment decline. In the four years from the 2000–01 school year to the 2004–05 school year:

- Total enrollment dropped from 20,643 to 19,317.
- Staff dropped from 2,611 to 2,460.
- Administrators decreased from 100 to 91.
- Support staff decreased from 877 to 787.
- Instructional staff went from 1,634 to 1,582.

Frank Harrington of Rhinelander could be the poster boy for what is going on with small, rural school districts. Now at age 62 and having logged 40 years in education, Harrington had retired three years ago as superintendent in Merrill. His retirement was short-lived, as he was recruited to become superintendent at the Athens School District in northwest Marathon County, even farther from his home, under a contract to work 174 days per year. A full-time employee with two weeks of vacation would work 245 days a year, so he was 70 percent of full-time. After that first year, when part of his duties included hiring a new principal for the high school/middle school, he and the district knocked 50 days off his contract, so he was essentially half-time. This year, he is down to 114 days.

Harrington is not alone. At the Edgar School District, just to the east, the superintendent who retired last year is still in the saddle while the district mulls whether to hire somebody full-time. That superintendent's predecessor is working part-time at a district a few towns in the other direction, and at Greenwood in Taylor County, the school district is talking with neighboring districts about possibly merging to cut total administrative costs. Similar arrangements are being devised across the state.

Harrington says that, thanks to a supportive and positive school board, his situation is working out. He's always there on Mondays to get the week off to a good start, but his presence the rest of the week depends on what needs doing and—to a degree—whether he's spending time with his grandchildren.

This is no job for a rookie. "It would be very difficult, probably next to impossible, for somebody without experience to do this," he says.

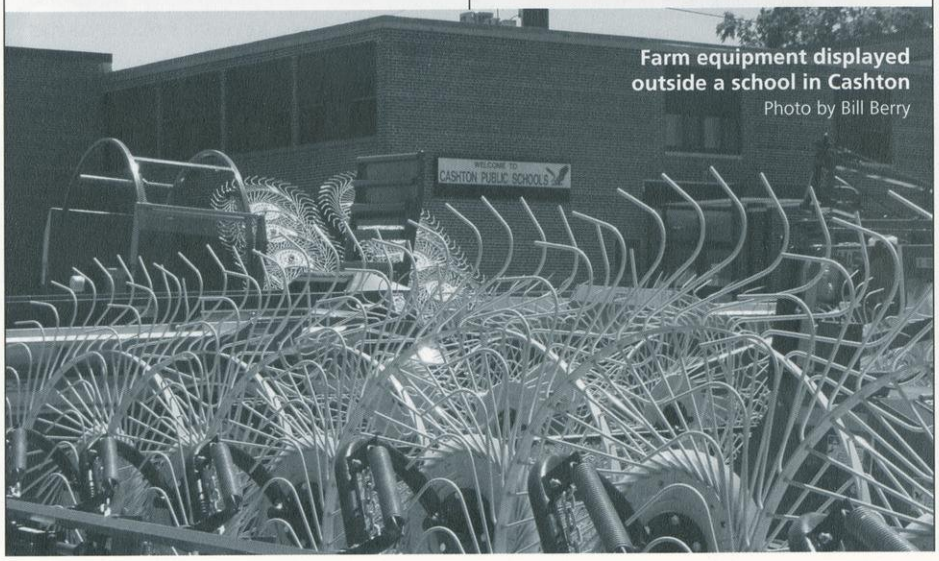
Athens is saving money, but Harrington, who started out as an elementary school teacher, would not describe the situation as ideal. He says a major disadvantage of being part-time is that he has little feel for what's happening in the trenches. "While I am in the district, I spend my time dealing with the managerial and business activities. This leaves little to no time to visit the classrooms and observe just what the business of education is really all about."

Harrington worries, too, about rising health insurance costs. The increase for Athens teachers last year was 21 percent. He says if that continues for a few years, the cost to the district to provide a family health insurance plan will exceed a teacher's starting salary. Athletics is affected, too. Granton High School has 93 students, making it hard to field any sort of athletic team or organize a school band. Athletic conferences in the state are realigning so enrollments are more equal. "You like to have opportunities for your kids where

It's not just Wisconsin

Nineteen states in addition to Wisconsin are dealing with the issue of declining school enrollment.

A U.S. Department of Education data survey found that between 2001 and 2013, six states will experience an enrollment drop of more than 3 percent. West Virginia is expected to have the largest drop at 6.1 percent. The next five in order of severity are Kentucky, with a decrease of 5.5; North Dakota, down 4.5; New York, down 3.5; and both Vermont and Ohio expecting to see enrollment down 3.2 percent. Wisconsin is in a group of five states including Minnesota and Iowa expecting enrollment decreases between 0.9 and 2 percent.



Farm equipment displayed outside a school in Cashton
Photo by Bill Berry

they can successfully compete," Harrington says.

Burmaster, who is in her sixth year as state school superintendent, says she has learned a lot in visits to hundreds of schools. She was struck early in her tenure by what she calls "very, very strong small rural school districts. Our students have had access to quality education no matter where they lived in the state."

It's a state with a lot of variety, though. The territory between Milwaukee and Madison is one thing. The Northwoods region is another. In towns like Sayner, between Boulder Junction and Eagle River, enrollment declines are especially troublesome because so much of the district land base is government-owned. Eighty-five percent of the land in the town is national forest, so it makes for long distances between stops for the bus drivers. A rural advisory council is looking at ways transportation aids can be beefed up for districts where students are spread sparsely, driving up per-student costs before the students even get to the classroom.

Burmaster and other educational experts like small school districts, so this is not a ploy to force a lot of consolidations like the ones that took place in the 1960s. She will propose as part of her budget a plan to give additional transportation aid to districts where three conditions exist—size under 2,000 students, density under 15 students per square mile, and at least 20 percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

It's a way to cope with the disparity that has on one end Whitefish Bay, with a school district of 2.1 square miles and a density of 1,365 students per square mile, and Boulder Junction, with a density of 0.73 per square mile.

The state would not be the same without smaller districts, Burmaster says. "This is a part of who we are in Wisconsin, and we want to keep that strong because it's a part of our history and tradition."

SMALL CAN BE GOOD

It's not as if small has no value. "School districts like Milwaukee are imitating what goes on in smaller school districts by creating smaller learning communities," notes Burmaster. Milwaukee has a $17 million Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant to go into large schools and redesign them into smaller learning communities. "A smaller culture where all the teachers know all the students and all the parents is more conducive to achievement and a good school culture," Burmaster says. Memorial High School in Madison is creating "neighborhoods" within its walls with shared teachers, counselors, and an assistant principal.

One of the challenges small districts face is a smaller pool of teachers willing to work in certain areas of the state. For all the pressure on lakefront property demand in the Northwoods, the northern tier of counties remains for many a place to visit, not a place to live. Burmaster hopes the budget she's submitting to the legislature will help that. Programs in the budget would improve municipal library services and spread the availability of high-speed Internet. "When schools and libraries are putting community first, that's a place where people would like to live. There have to be jobs and access to technology," she says.

Burmaster says the communities themselves have a lot at stake. Go to any public hearing where a school closing is being considered and the message of the speakers will be that the school is the heart of the community, a common gathering spot and source of pride.

The state would not be the same without these smaller districts, Burmaster says. "This is a part of who we are in Wisconsin, and we want to keep that strong because it's a part of our history and tradition."

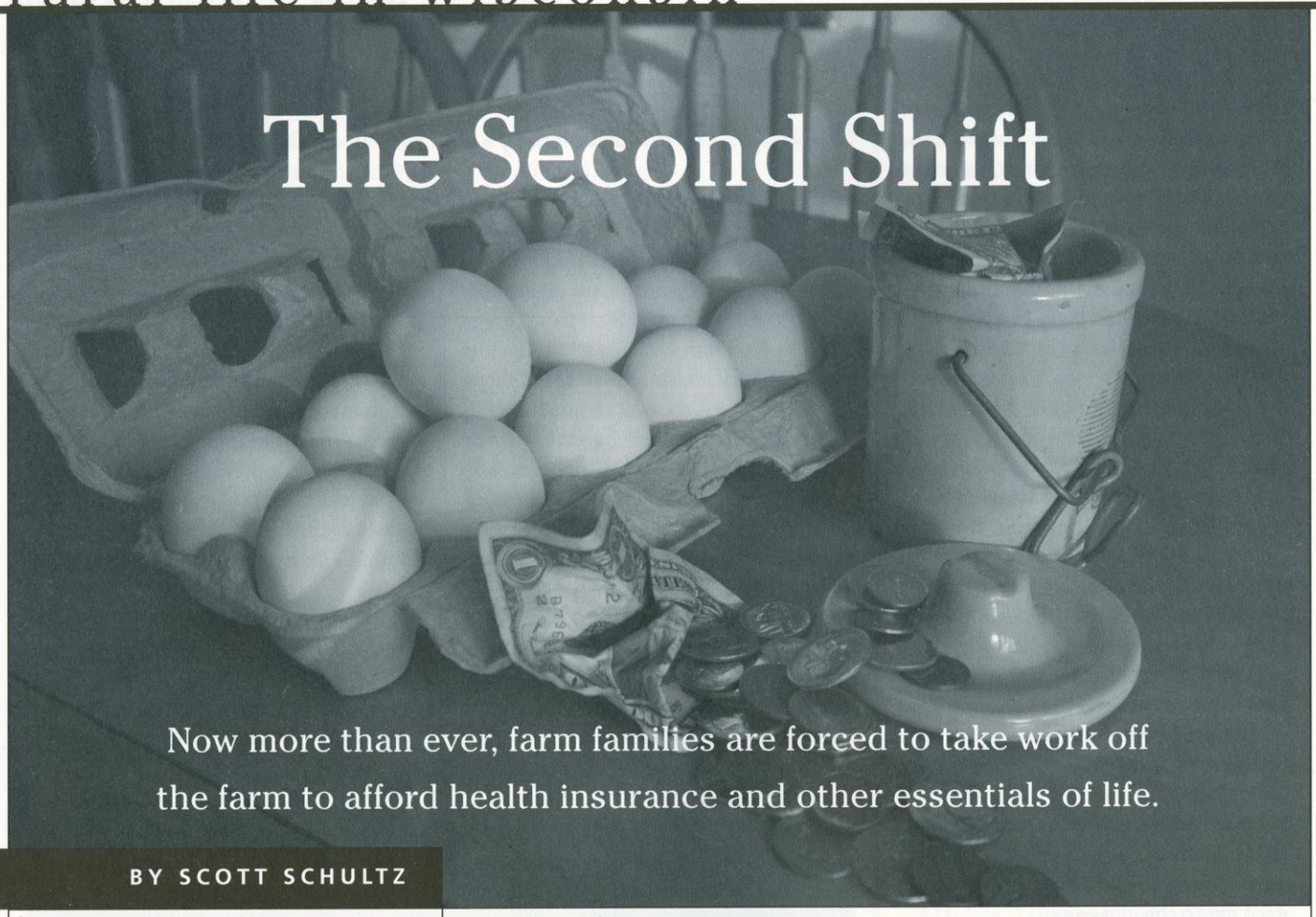
One of the things she's helping with is bringing together a coalition of rural communities that could have a lot more effect on the legislature as a group than they could if they jumped up and down individually. She hopes lawmakers support another proposal she's pushing to boost youth leadership in rural areas and encourage college attendance.

If done right, it could have a potential benefit to the economy, she says. If young people from the area graduate from college and have a positive view of the prospect of living in a small community, they are more likely to return. "We hope that they will return to smaller communities, that there will be jobs for them—and that if they don't settle into their own communities, they will settle into another smaller community," Burmaster says. ✹

For more on the Future of Farming initiative and rural schools, visit www.wisconsinacademy.org/idea/.
For more information on general issues facing small rural schools, visit www.ruraledu.org.
For more information on Department of Public Instruction activities and rural schools, visit www.dpi.state.wi.us/rural/index.html.

Pat Peckham is a longtime Wisconsin journalist and writer who works as news editor for ***City Pages*** *of Wausau.*

The Second Shift



Now more than ever, farm families are forced to take work off the farm to afford health insurance and other essentials of life.

BY SCOTT SCHULTZ

Photo by Sara Bredesen/*The Country Today*

THERE WASN'T MUCH FAMILIAR TO ME as we opened the door to enter the small-town tavern where we'd celebrate my sister's retirement from the workforce.

"Have you been here before?" my friend asked as I held the door open for her.

My tongue touched the roof of my mouth to start forming the "n" to answer "no," but stopped there. I had been there—though not when the building contained a tavern and small celebration room.

We paused in the doorway as I contemplated the building, the role it played in my development, and how it represented so many changes that had taken place in that Marathon County farm town during my 50 years of life.

"Yes, I've been here," I finally answered. "I've been here many times, but not since it was turned into a tavern."

The place, when I went there so many times in younger years, was Picus IGA, one of Spencer's downtown focal points. It was the place where my parents came to buy groceries with the little money left over after paying feed bills and other expenses associated with our small dairy farm about seven miles to the southwest.

We walked into the building. I recognized the ramped floor immediately inside the doors and the old black-and-white checkerboard tile flooring. But that was about all that seemed familiar.

I allowed my mind to take me back, though. To the right was where Sid Picus was likely to be leaning across the meat counter, chewing a cigar and offering his wisdom to all who would listen. Straight ahead was the checkout

lane where Sid's brother, Ralph, would take care of customers' transactions.

Those few seconds of thinking about Ralph's work at the store gave me pause that day and have since made me contemplate all that many farmers have gone through over the years—and continue to go through—to purchase many of life's staples, whether the staples are laundry detergent, olive oil, or health care.

It was at Ralph's checkout lane that I so often watched my mother exchange a few dozen eggs to offset some of our family's grocery bill or provide mom with a couple extra dollars to help her buy treats for us over at the dimestore.

Egg money.

The egg money was one of the ways the folks augmented our farm's dairy-based income. It came from many sources, including feeder-pig sales from the few brood sows we kept on the farm. But some of the "egg money" didn't come from anything produced on our farm; it came from work both parents did away from our farm.

In her younger years, mom took time away from her everyday barn chores and keeping up with the youngest of six children to work on a cheese-processing company's assembly line. In her later years, she provided health insurance by working at a nursing and rehabilitation facility.

Dad did some part-time work at a nearby lumber mill. He'd operate a township snowplowing truck on nights when blizzards blew. He served as the township's chairman. And he used our farm's aging New Idea corn picker to do some custom corn harvesting around the neighborhood.

Some days, I've mused about all our parents did while raising us—somehow always giving us the family time and attention that we needed but doing what it took to make ends meet. I worried about why my parents needed to do that extra work to keep alive the dreams our family sustained on that farm for more than 100 years.

Little was said about my parents' extra work—either as they did it or after they had long been retired. In our farm family (and, I'd later learn, in many others), the extra work was just another part of rural life. Never spoken were the awe-striking words "She's working a second shift to make ends meet" that we'd occasionally hear from our urban neighbors. It was just work to our family; it was just part of farming.

Health insurance costs are so high for farmers that 14 percent of state farm families don't have health insurance coverage. About 10,000 farm children are uninsured.

Our family wasn't alone, and, if my parents were still alive and farming, they wouldn't be alone to this day. Indeed, farm statistics make it painfully clear that farmers are in even greater need of "egg money" than they were in 1970, when my parents were reaching the end of their farming careers.

Inflation-adjusted milk and crop prices are lower than they were in 1970, according to the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. In 1970, Wisconsin farmers received $5.12 for a hundredweight of milk; the inflation-adjusted 2004 price was $3.47 per hundredweight (and the real 2004 milk price was higher than it is today). The price farmers received for corn in 1970 was $1.37 per bushel; the inflation-adjusted 2005 price was 73.2 percent less.

In the meantime, the farmers' operating costs were rising and family-related expenses—particularly health care costs—have risen dramatically.

No longer can farmers go into a local grocery store and barter a couple dozen eggs to offset a grocery bill that, by 2007 standards, is chicken feed.

No longer can farmers take their children to have ear infections fixed by the farm-town doctor for the price of $10—penicillin shots included—office visits.

"Things were tough years ago, but now things really cost big money," dad told me not too long before he died.

There's plenty of evidence that dad knew his stuff.

Helene Nelson, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services secretary, said recently that health insurance costs are so high for farmers that 14 percent of state farm families don't have health insurance coverage. About 10,000 farm children are uninsured.

Sandi Cihlar of Mosinee says the three branches of the Cihlar family that operate her family's Marathon County dairy farm pay about $4,950 per month for health insurance.

"I don't know how much longer we can afford that kind of coverage," Cihlar said in August during a Future of Farming forum held by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in Mosinee.

A Wisconsin Farm Bureau survey last year showed that farmers paying for their own health insurance paid an average of $8,826 per year. Meanwhile, people who obtain health insurance through off-farm jobs pay $4,245 per year.

The answer would seem to be somewhere in an updated version of the Picus IGA checkout line: the "egg money" to improve farm income and pay for staples such as health insurance comes from selling value-added farm products or taking off-farm jobs.

A 2002 University of Wisconsin Program on Agricultural Technologies survey showed 11 percent to 14 percent of the state's farm household income is derived from off-farm labor, the majority being from spouses of primary farm operators working a "second" job.

The continuing idea of earning off-farm income isn't for everyone.

Cihlar says she doesn't like the idea of having to work away from her family's farm because "it diminishes the quality of life on the farm."

Linda Kleinschmidt of Madison, a state senate staff worker, says she's happy to hear that her bosses—partic-

ularly newly elected Democratic Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, an Alma-area farmer—show commitment to working on health care solutions that will help keep farmers from having to work for so much "egg money." Kleinschmidt knows how important that issue is because her father did off-farm work for about 30 years.

"It was really health care coverage that kept him there," she says of her father, John (Jerry) Anderson, who worked at 3M in Minneapolis while he and his family operated a dairy farm on the edge of Rice Lake. "He worked 20 hours a day on a lot of days. He got up in the morning, milked the cows, and when he'd get done, he'd go to work a full shift at 3M. My brothers and I would get home from school and have to milk the cows. If there hadn't been the three of us kids there doing the work, we wouldn't have been able to farm."

Kleinschmidt says she might be richer for the experience.

"If things broke down while dad was at 3M, we had to fix it," she says. "We learned at a young age how important baling wire and duct tape are for fixing things."

Despite any gains she and her family might have had from her father's extra work, Kleinschmidt says she'd much rather have had her entire family together—experiencing all the rich quality of life that's available in the rural countryside.

"It's really important that so much gets done in the legislature so farmers don't have to work other jobs to provide health insurance for their families," she says.

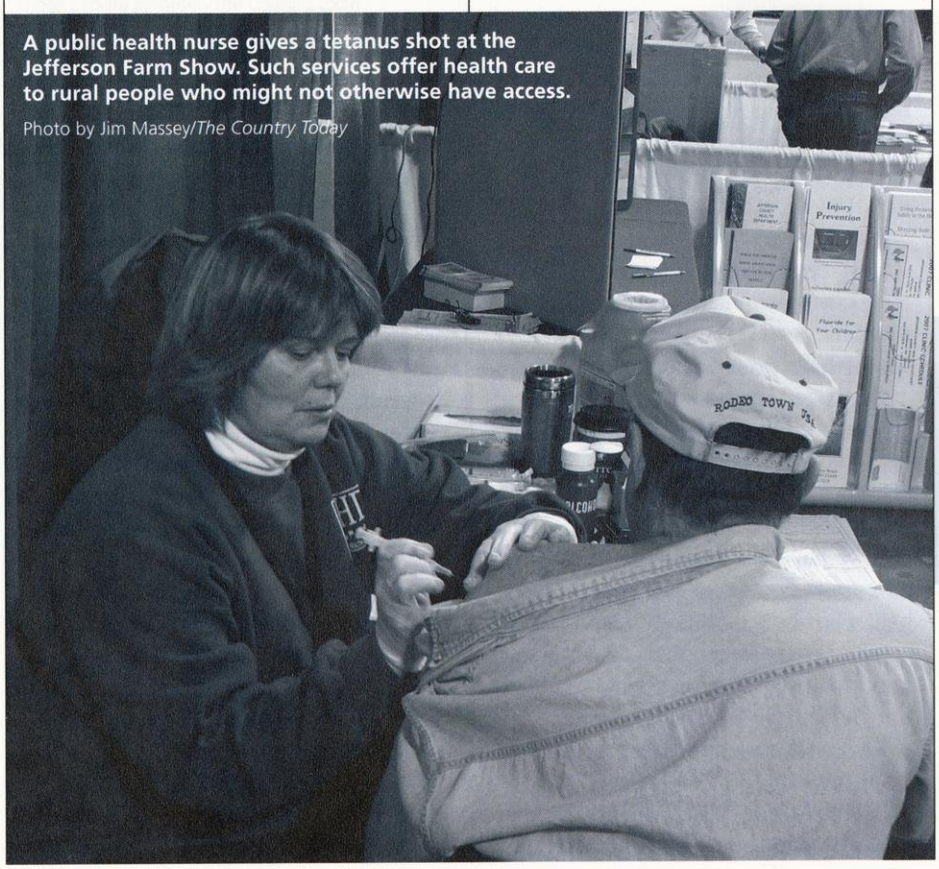
Leaning on the bar in what used to be the Picus IGA store, I considered how much more vital it's become for so many of today's farmers to find extra money and benefits from places other than their farms. Changes in the way most farms have been pushed to operate don't allow for the small-farm diversity many of us knew in bygone years. If the primary farm income isn't available, there won't be a couple of chickens to pluck from the coop; there won't be a barrow to butcher.

These days, if the primary farm income isn't enough, there will have to be far more than a few dozen eggs, a few hours at a cheese plant or a nursing home, a few hours plowing snow, or even custom-harvesting a few extra acres of corn. These days, making ends meet means—probably more than ever—that full-time jobs, complete with benefits, will have to be found if many farmers are going to hold onto their rural dreams.

In some cases, that's a choice families make because of professional off-farm ambitions. In some cases, there is no choice.

As I left the old Picus IGA store, I wondered whether, had I chosen the farming path my parents and brothers took, I'd have been able to operate a farm profitably enough so I or others in my family wouldn't have to work for modern-day "egg money." I considered how, at most places I'd worked, employee handbooks even discouraged moonlighting; they'd say such things as, "We strive to compensate our employees well enough that moonlighting won't be needed."

There are plenty of days, I thought as I got into my car, when I look at some of my farming brethren and see how they have no choice but to work a "second shift" for the vast amounts of egg money to keep their farms and their families alive. And I wonder how they do it. ✹



A public health nurse gives a tetanus shot at the Jefferson Farm Show. Such services offer health care to rural people who might not otherwise have access.

Photo by Jim Massey/*The Country Today*

Scott Schultz is managing editor of ***The Country Today****, an Eau Claire-based newspaper that covers Upper Midwest rural news and features. He also is author of the book* ***Rural Routes and Ruts: Roaming the Roads of Rural Life.***

Wisconsin's People on the Land

An exhibition and related events at the Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery provide a visual arts perspective on the future of farming and rural life in Wisconsin.

BY RUTH OLSON, WITH MARTHA GLOWACKI AND RANDALL BERNDT

FROM THE PICTURE ON OUR LICENSE PLATE to the images on our quarter, our state's citizens imagine agriculture and Wisconsin as almost synonymous. The richness and variety of agricultural enterprise here—dairy, beef, and other livestock; cranberries and other fruit; vegetables, ginseng, tobacco—assure that agriculture deeply affects not only Wisconsin's economic life but also its cultural life. Farming in Wisconsin continues to stimulate our imaginations, color our art, enrich our stories and poetry, and express our values.

However, often the image people hold of farming is based on a picture-book version of red barns and happy cows, a nostalgic vision uncomplicated by economic and social realities. Most people in the state haven't been inside a free-stall barn or milking parlor; most are unaware of native agricultural traditions; most haven't come face-to-face with the stark realities of running a small family farm within a changing community.

The artworks shown on the following pages are from "Wisconsin's People on the Land," an exhibition on view at the Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery in Overture from April 3 through May 20 (see page 43 for a complete listing of exhibition events). "Wisconsin's People on the Land" is part of the Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin, a multiyear initiative run by the Wisconsin Academy that brings together citizens, experts, and stakeholders from all areas of agriculture and rural life to gather and analyze the most solid information about challenges and opportunities in this vital sector and use it to inform public policy and education in our state.

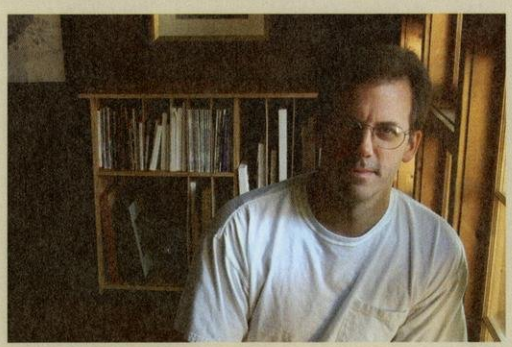
"Wisconsin's People on the Land" examines the changing rural landscape as seen through the eyes of four artists with deep roots in our rural culture, artists who have made deliberate decisions to live and work in Wisconsin. All of the artwork in the exhibition emphasizes the close connections of people to place. These are portraits of people *and* land.

Milwaukee artist David Lenz's photorealist paintings depict life and landscape on a small dairy farm in Sauk County; Lenz, who owns land adjacent to this farm, has developed a close friendship with its owners. Photographer Tom Jones, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation who lives in Madison, documents his tribe's traditional agricultural practices including the planting and harvest of corn and tobacco, gathering of wild food and medicinal plants, and the Ho-Chunk buffalo ranch near Muscoda. Julie Lindemann and John Shimon, who live and work collaboratively in Manitowoc, have created a series of photographs reflecting contemporary family dairy farms in east-central Wisconsin.

The planning of this exhibition included talking with both the artists and the people within the art. Exhibition curators Randall Berndt and Martha Glowacki, co-directors of the Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery, interviewed the artists. UW–Madison folklorist Ruth Olson interviewed several farmers whose farms are documented in these images. She spoke with Erv and Mercedes Wagner of Sauk County; JoAnn Jones, former president of the Ho-Chunk Nation and mother of Tom Jones; Angela Geiger Zwald and her parents, Rosalie and Randy Geiger of Manitowoc County (the Geiger family, including son Corey, have been photographed by Shimon and Lindemann over several years); and Karl Klessig, who with other members of a family partnership operates a 450-cow pastoral-style dairy farm in Manitowoc County.

While the artworks tell their own eloquent stories, we wanted to give exhibition viewers and readers a chance to hear the voices of some of the people in the paintings and photographs as well as the voices of the artists themselves. These voices reflect the spark and spice of talking, not the polish of writing. From a larger selection of oral stories and observations in the exhibition, we have chosen a few themes to emphasize here—relationship to land and livestock, concerns about development and environmental issues, as well as relationships between artists and farmers—a combination that serves as a springboard for reflection on our changing rural economy, cultural identity, and sense of place.

Thistles (2001), David Lenz. Oil on linen, 32" x 54" From the collection of Pieper Electric, Inc.



DAVID LENZ

David Lenz grew up in Brookfield and studied art at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. For many years, Lenz's paintings were based on the urban scenes and people near his home on the east side of Milwaukee. After he purchased 40 acres of land in rural Sauk County, Lenz became friends with his neighbors Erv and Mercedes Wagner. The Wagners' lives and the landscape of their dairy farm became the subject matter for Lenz's intensely realistic oil paintings—the urbanite artist became absorbed in the atmosphere of daily life on a small, traditional farm.

IN DAVID LENZ'S WORDS

Painting Erv and Mercedes

I remember the day that I asked Erv and Mercedes, I went to their farm and—we never really talked about what I did, we talked about local things, the farm, animals—I said to them, "You know that I'm an artist and I paint cityscapes right now, but I'm looking to do something different, I'm thinking about doing some farm scenes. So I am wondering if it would be all right if I could paint your farm and you." And they both kind of blushed with pride, and then it was like, "Oh, well, that would be nice." And Erv at some point said, "You're welcome anytime, and walk around the place as if it's yours."

I don't really feel like there is any way to completely relate to their lives and see through their eyes, because their life is so much different than my life. So as much as I try to hang out there and listen to them, try to understand them, I'm still a city boy and I will never be able to relate as fully as I would like.

Some Kind of Authenticity

I've always felt like an odd duck in the art world because I was painting realistically when it was so unfashionable. If I had to categorize myself, I would call myself a social realist, or a regionalist, because I really do try to soak in the region and portray that as honestly as I can. And in the paintings of Erv

Dairyland (2003), David Lenz. Oil on linen, 30" x 36" Courtesy of Daniel and Linda Bader

and Mercedes, one of the things that I tried to accomplish is I tried to have some kind of authenticity. So when Erv and Mercedes look at them they won't say, "Oh, it's not like that. We wouldn't park the tractor there. Or what is that cow doing there?" I always want things to be plausible, I manipulate things and I change them around, but always with the goal of it being somehow plausible. I don't want anything to get in the way of understanding the people.

Little Pieces of Reality

I have always felt that photographs were my tool to getting at daily life; it's my quick and easy sketchbook, if you will. I can document little pieces of reality and be able to look at the details back at the studio. The end result is to make the painting look as real as possible, so you can step into the painting almost, like walking in the shoes of the person that's painted. My goal was never to imitate photography.

A Mansion on Every Hillside

Across the street from my place and Erv and Mercedes', there is a farm that was just sold to a developer. It is a company that specializes in buying large farms and breaking them up into tiny little pieces and selling them off as home sites. To me that is a disturbing trend because once farms get converted into residential use it's never going to go back. Or at least it is not going to go back in many lifetimes. It seems like this never-ending slow and steady march of development is creeping to some of the most beautiful parts of the state. One of the things that defines the Midwest is its open spaces, its rural countryside. If you drive down those country roads and see a mansion sitting on every beautiful hillside, what a terrible waste. It seems like the countryside is being loved to death.

Cold Front (2002), David Lenz. Oil on board, 9¼" x 11" Courtesy of Kevin Walsh and Sue Clausing

IN ERV WAGNER'S WORDS

All Those Empty Jars!

My dad made a living here for the 10 kids, and I made a living here for our three. Quite a few families were raised here on this place.

My mother never worked out, she always was home. She'd make 12 loaves of bread a day when us kids were all here, all 10 of us. We had blueberries up there, they were just thicker than hell. We'd pick a hundred quarts of them. And we canned them. Plus she'd have probably a hundred quarts of tomatoes, and beans. And our pork, we butchered two or three of them, but we put them all down in salt brine. Then besides the blueberries, she'd always have a bushel and a half of peaches canned. And when spring was here they were gone! All those empty jars! We still got that cupboard downstairs, in the basement.

I just sold the cows a year ago, day after Thanksgiving. I wanted to keep on going. I wanted to keep on milking yet. That's all I really knew, knew the most.

She's Gonna Die Here

We had cows here 21, 22 years old. And my daughter's was sick one night, and my brother said, "Sell that cow, she's gonna die!" I said, "Burt, she's going on 21 years old, and she raised our kids up, giving milk to the kids. And Mary drank a lot of her milk." And by God she freshened, and oh, she had a beautiful heifer calf. But a couple weeks later, she didn't make it. She died. But I said, "She's gonna die here." I could have sold her, probably got a couple hundred bucks out of her, but I said, "Nope. She's gonna die here."

Late Season Storm (2002), David Lenz. Watercolor on paper, 5¼" x 7¼" Courtesy of Steve and Jane Cernof

Little Pieces of Reality

Lenz has got 1,800-and-some pictures of this farm, one way or the other. I see a writeup he got in the paper, where they wrote the story? He said he had 1,800 pictures of the Wagner farm.

A Mansion on Every Hillside

They're going to put 12 houses in that field right next door here. See all the flags out there? Did you look up the valley, see that great big house in that pasture, way up there? That's a million-dollar home! Jesus Christ!

You Wouldn't Get Me Out of Here

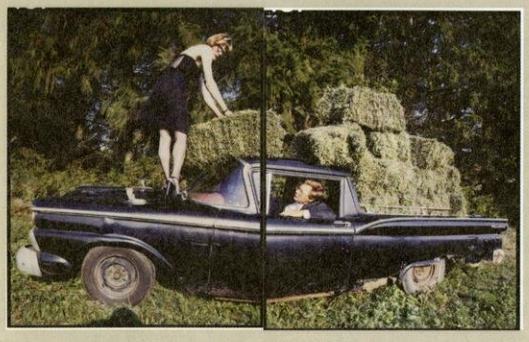
I said, "How much you got? Come on in! If you got money I'll talk to you any day." We came in and we sat here from about two o'clock on. He said, "I'll give you the same as I did over there." It come to about $3,200 an acre. And I said, "Oh, wait a minute, I got 120 acres here and I ain't gonna bust that off, take it off my 120, no way!" I got one of the nicest springs down there. Oh, beautiful spring in there, running water all the time. And he ain't got no running water at that place no ways at all, other than the well. But anyways, he said, "I'll leave my number here. We'll be back Saturday, or you call me tonight, and we'll be back Saturday and bring you the money up."

When he come, I said I wanted $100,000. Well, I haven't heard any more, it's still going, but I think they'll take it. If I get $100,000 out of 18 or 14 acres of land, I'm going to sell it, don't think I won't. That'll do me and her for the rest of our lives. I know one, two, three, four farms right around here already sold their farms to live. And I talked to one lady here recently, and she said, they ain't got very much damn money left. They bought a house in town, high taxes too. I'd go to an apartment, the hell with owning, pay taxes any more, I'd go to an apartment somewhere.

But you wouldn't get me out of here; I wouldn't leave here in the first place.

Angela, Randy, Corey and Rosalie Geiger (Ran–Rose Farms), Reedsville, Wisconsin (NE to SE to SW), 2006
Inkjet pigment print, 10" x 40" © J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

Making hay while the sun is shining (No. 2), Whitelaw, Wisconsin, 2004.
Inkjet pigment print, 10" x 16" © J. Shimon & J. Lindemann



SHIMON AND LINDEMANN

John Shimon and Julie Lindemann live and work in Manitowoc. They photograph collaboratively, drawing much of their subject matter from the adjacent rural farm area where they both grew up. Their work combines the use of antique large-format-view cameras, sophisticated art historical knowledge, and a deep empathy for the subjects portrayed in the figure-in-landscape portraits for which they have become nationally known. The accompanying image shows the artists at work on the farm they own, which was a Shimon family holding for several generations. They also are assistant professors in the department of art and art history at Lawrence University in Appleton.

IN SHIMON AND LINDEMANN'S WORDS

This Is Where We Grew Up

Julie: People always ask, "Why are you here? How can you stand being here? There's no art community. There's little culture. What do you do?" I think in some ways there's a degree of masochism to it. But on the other hand there's also a sense that we're very isolated and there's time to work and to really focus on working. This is where we grew up, more or less, in Manitowoc County.

And also we felt if we were other places photographing that there was somehow something not genuine about the kinds of pictures we made.

These Stories Stay With Us

Julie: It's always an amazing thing to me that people are willing to be photographed. There's this sense that we all want to be remembered somehow, that we want to make our mark, that we don't want to just fade away. It's a big mystery to me, why people want to photograph each other. Why do they do it even as a personal snapshot? So I think part of this impulse is why people are willing to pose and work with us on our photo-

graphs, maybe the sense that since we stop and photograph them, somehow they'll be remembered. It's a very eerie thing, actually, to live with all these lives. We've documented many hundreds. These stories stay with us.

American Gothic

John: A lot of times I think the main departure point for these pictures is Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic*, which all of our subjects know. Which in some ways is sort of the model that we work from, even though it wasn't necessarily a documentary image in the idea of specificity—it was models posed and juxtaposed with the landscape, but what it represented was certainly something from real life.

Julie: I think there's this holistic thing; we're not just photographing people like they're a celebrity, but their animal, the landscape, all of this stuff that tells a story. But we do have to contrast this to our experiences photographing for *The New York Times Magazine*, for example, where people are celebrities and they have a stylist and are yelling at us that we're not going to be showing them the way they need to be shown. In fact, one woman, a news anchor in Minneapolis, said to us, "I know about you people from *The New York Times*! I know how you're going to show me!" We're just like, "Let us alone—we're from Wisconsin, we just have this gig, we've got to get this film in." So in contrast, the rural people we've been photographing are much more willing to share their stories and not take us by the neck and say, "My stylist will style me this way, and you will only get that shot."

IN ANGELA GEIGER ZWALD'S WORDS

Allergic to Cows

I have a story that John and Julie know: I am allergic to cows. I found this out in seventh or eighth grade. I was just breaking out in hives all the time. We couldn't figure out what was going on, and finally the allergist said, "You're allergic to cows." You see pictures of me when I was showing cattle at the county fair—I mean my face was red, my eyes were nearly swelled shut. Apparently I had passion for what I was doing.

Kit

Kit was always special from Day One. She was gentle, she learned quickly; when you showed her at the fair, she led herself around the ring. It was very hard to deal with it when she passed away. I mean, she was just a special cow. I was in college, I was probably 21 when she died. But every time that I came home she was the first one I went to see. I think actually my mom called [Shimon and Lindemann] when Kit passed away to tell them, because they were always so excited, you know, "Oh, Kit!" Kit was a trouper. She was just a good cow.

Posing

I was always supposed to have a serious expression on my face. And I think that's important because there aren't too many people in my generation that are super excited about where the family farm is going. I was breaking out in hives all over but I'm still standing there, and my brother's helping and my mom is helping, and it's just the team effort that goes into farming, it has to be there or you're not going to be successful.

Rosalie and Randy Geiger in barn, Reedsville, Wisconsin, 2006
Inkjet pigment print, 10" x 8" © J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

IN ROSALIE AND RANDY GEIGER'S WORDS

Spirit and Kristal

Randy: She was my baby. Spirit just kind of came on. She just kept milking and living, and milking and living, and had calves, and doing a good job, and all of a sudden she broke the 300,000-pound lifetime. Then she was still milking good and eating good and doing everything, reproducing well, you know? And she was never a vet cow, where you would spend a lot of money on her, she just kept doing well and doing well. And she was at I think, 342,000 lifetime, so she was getting on the state and/or national lifetime milk record, like 10th place or 12th place. And she was working one day, we just got done milking her and we heard—there was an aluminum ceiling right above her, and you heard like BBs—ping ping ping ping—and there she was eating her grain, and she had a heart attack and her head flipped up and all the grain was flying out, and she fell over dead. Which was a good way to go. She's buried on the farm, and it was a very sad day, but then she had another offspring named Kristal. Spirit had 342,000 lifetime; Kristal had 384,000 lifetime and was due to calve in August. She was a very big cow, and she started getting hip problems because she was 17 years old.

A side note: that's part of the reason we kind of stayed the size we were, because we could work with cows like that, because the average age of a cow—the average age or lactation right now—you don't even get two lactations or two calvings out of a cow, commercial-wise, which to me is a sin. To me, that's a total neglect of whatever they call mother nature. That's not the reason they were given to us.

So, her hip was getting bad, and we wanted to at least keep her for another calving, we figured she'd lose the weight by the calf. Well, I never want to get rid of nothing.

So then we kept her here and Corey would come home and work with her, and Angela would work with her, and then she was laying back. And at the end she was beating her head trying to get up. So then of course I've got to do something. So I said, "Well, I'm leaving. So you guys do what you want to do." Then Corey says, "I'm leaving." We've got a vet, he's very close to the herd and he's dedicated. Corey called him and said, "You've got to put this cow down for us." "Kristal? Corey, I worked on that cow for 17 years! I really don't want to do it." Corey said, "Ah, we're not going to do it." "Well," he said, "I'm a licensed veterinarian. That's part of my job so I should come and do it." So he pulls his truck over there on a Saturday morning. And the cow when he walked over there had water running out of her eyes.

Rosalie: Well, she looked like she was crying. She tried so hard. There wasn't a dry eye here, I'll tell you!

Randy: So then the vet starts crying, and I thought, "Oo-eee, Kristal!" And I said, "Well, goodbye, everybody." I left and I went for a walk in the woods, you know. But first I called a

Karl Klessig with cattle crossing (Saxon Homestead Farm LLC), Cleveland, Wisconsin (NW to NE to SE), 2006
Platinum-palladium print, 10" x 40" © J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

neighbor here who had a backhoe, because we wanted to bury her next to Spirit over there, and he said, "You're just in luck, I'm just leaving." I said, "The vet ain't done with her yet, so just wait! Hold your horses," I said. "If you come, keep your backhoe and stay away till he's done." Then he put her down, and that was a bad day.

Rosalie: That was a bad day for everybody.

IN KARL KLESSIG'S WORDS

Life of a Cow

The average dairy cow life expectancy in the state is about 44 months. It's not very old. The expected life of a cow under idyllic conditions is about 15 years. So they live to be just a little under four. But a hardworking dairy cow should be able to have a 10- to 12-year productive life. That's what I consider an old cow, working as hard as they work to produce milk. I don't care if it's producing a little bit of milk or a lot of milk. Cows work hard.

Dad's Vision for Farming

Dad had Aldo Leopold for a professor for one semester at the University of Wisconsin in 1939. And way back, when I was knee-high to a grasshopper, I heard about Aldo Leopold. Yup, he made an impression on my dad and that was my dad's vision for farming. Farming should be all about community and land preservation, and what goes on in the woods, and wildlife, and maple syrup ... At that time UW was just starting to throw everything at 'em about the Green Revolution; about chemicals and agri-fertilizers. He had a great respect for UW and for a while in the '50s and early-to-mid-'60s, he tried a lot of the agri-chemicals. But he learned that that was not a cool way to farm.

Lake Michigan

Does Lake Michigan have an effect? I've got to tell you it does, in a very positive way, especially for grass farmers. We are definitely saved by beautiful Lake Michigan every summer. When western Wisconsin is just sweltering away in 100-degree heat, we get that beautiful east wind off the lake, and many days at about 1 o'clock you can feel that cool breeze coming in. And cows like it. Lake Michigan is just an awesome resource. She is beautiful. And that's one of the reasons why, as a dairy farmer, I am so committed to making sure that her water is safe and clean. I feel responsible to help the dairy community take care of that lake. We just got to, you know, you got to. There's no other choice.

Shimon and Lindemann Visit

It was pretty cool. Because they came in a Volvo, I think, you know, like this $50,000 car. So I looked out the window and I thought, "Oh my God, these people are going to be—they probably won't like our farm." Because they're going to have gold shoes on! Anyway, Julie gets out of the car. She had long black hair, and she had it in one ponytail. She had these big 1950-style glasses on, with a motorcycle jacket, and black jeans with boots. And I thought, "Wow! Who the heck is that?" That was cool, and Johnny, he sort of looked like me! He had jeans on, and this old torn jacket, and they were just the coolest people. It was like, "Holy man! When can I party with you?"

Who We Are and What We Do

The quandary is that farmers represent less than 2 percent of the population. And as dairy farmers, we're probably less than half a percent of the U.S. population. Some of the changes that are happening within the dairy community I think are interpreted as not so good. As farms consolidate and become larger they may be viewed as industrial giants that have tons of environmental problems, where the cows are treated cruelly, and where the manure ends up in Lake Michigan every single day. I know this is not the case, so this is a concern for me. Because by and large most farmers are incredibly industrious people who are well intended and who do the best job they possibly can. They truly love what they're doing and want to do a great job. As our society becomes more and more and more removed from the land, farmers have to take every opportunity to tell our story and help people understand who we are and what we do.

Jim Funmaker in His Tobacco Field (2000), Tom Jones. Inkjet print, 18" x 18"

TOM JONES

Tom Jones lives in Madison and teaches photography in the art department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Jones is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Through his photographs, he explores the various ways that Ho-Chunk culture is alive and flourishing. Jones contrasts his artwork with photographs by 19th-century non-Native artists whose imagery often portrayed the romance of the "vanishing Indian." The accompanying photograph shows Jones with his grandfather ("Choka"), Jim Funmaker, and his mother, JoAnn Jones.

IN TOM JONES' WORDS

The Work That I Do

I was coming back from Chicago almost every weekend to photograph for my graduate school work and I was spending a lot of time with my grandfather ["Choka"], learning the traditional medicines. A few months after my grandfather passed away, my family asked me to take his place in the medicine lodge. The work that I do with the tribe probably would not be possible if I was not Ho-Chunk. All of my work is about identity and place because this is where the homeland of the Ho-Chunk is—here in Wisconsin.

Choka

In some of the images with my grandfather, I was just helping him pick the medicine and the tobacco. He loved getting his picture taken; he was always ready for it and at certain times he would actually tell me, "You know you should take a picture of this." He was a wonderful person to take pictures of.

Playing Against Romanticism

People have asked me, "Is this documentary photography or is this art?" In the earlier work I was playing against the work of Edward Curtis, and that is one reason I chose to do

***Jim Funmaker with Gourds* (2002), Tom Jones. Silver gelatin print, 18" x 18"**

black and white photography. I wanted to play against that romanticism that he had in his photographs, but also I wanted to throw a contemporary twist into those images.

IN JOANN JONES' WORDS

Choka

He was quite a man. He would say, "I'm still a boy, I'm still a young boy," and he was almost 100. "I learn every day," he said. "You look at creation. That's going to teach you about life. You look at creation, that will teach you everything."

When Choka was growing his Indian tobacco, he noticed acid rain long before other people started talking about it. He said, "Those chemicals, that stuff is burning into our leaves and making holes into the tobacco." He said, "Those people are affecting our environment and affecting our plants." And that's what's happening, too, not only to tobacco, but to medicinal plants and to our food chain. You know, this environment is affecting them. And plants move, too. You can see it with milkweed, one of our delicacies. They're not in the locations where they used to be. We have to go all over to find milkweed. And also there's a problem with property—you can't get out to those locations where the plant grows like you used to. Like those baskets? It's getting to be real difficult to obtain wood to make our baskets. You can't get into property anymore to be able to cut those trees.

Near the Corn

A well-respected woman of our nation, Nellie Redcloud, when I was very young, told me that you had to be with your corn when they were young; up to when they reach your knees, you should be near your corn.

Usually, they were all near their corn because they lived out in rural areas. My aunt was the one that raised us, my father's sister. And she really set an example for our corn. She took care of corn all her life. Raised it, dried it, cooked it, and had people coming to the house to help her dry it, kind of like a gathering, you know, to take the kernels off the corn and dry them. I remember piles of corn to be taken care of. I also remember how wonderful that corn soup tasted. My sister and I both live in town, we're urban people, so we grew our corn in Muscoda on the Nation's buffalo farm. Since we couldn't be near our plants all the time, we used to go out and talk to them, as we were taking care of them.

***JoAnn Jones and Aneesha Decorah Picking Milkweed* (2000), Tom Jones. Silver gelatin print, 18" x 18"**

It's a staple for the family, but a lot of the Traditionals who use it, use it for our ceremonies and our rituals. And of course when we eat it, it's part of a special occasion. It's more than just a food.

It Made for a Busy Life

I lived in many places—North Carolina, Georgia, Florida. In North Carolina, I remember you had to wear a hat and gloves to go downtown, the Southern way—can you imagine an Indian sitting there wearing a hat and gloves? That's why I said, I'm not the traditional kind of Traditional. You know, I've been exposed to a lot of different things, and a lot of different ways.

We were never held back as women. I'm a member of the Bear clan. And my aunt and all the men that were in my life never held us back. They made us hunt; they made us drive; they encouraged education. It was my father, who went only to third grade, who encouraged education. Yet they would expect you to do the things that traditionally a woman would do. But that was really bad too, I wasn't good at that. It made for a busy life.

My father was a trapper, too, he always trapped, all his life, trapped all over. I remember from high school, I came home one night, and there was a bunch of beaver laying on top of the kitchen table, and muskrats. And my aunt said, she said in Indian, "Go ahead and skin all those." And I said, "I don't know how to do that!" And she said, "Well, what did they teach you in home ec?!"

My People

I hear a lot of people say, "We just can't get near those Ho-Chunk," what they know, what they carry with them of their culture. They didn't trust a lot of people with that information. One time I gave a talk somewhere and I was telling them about the sacred spots we have. They said, "Well, tell us [where they are] so we could protect them." And I said, "Oh yeah, that's going to protect them all right!"

Something that I thought about when I was away is that my people, the Ho-Chunk—everything was spiritually based. Nothing was ever done frivolously. They didn't say, "This is the way you have to do it." And there could be different groups and religions, because in our tribe we have Christians, we have Traditionals, and we have Native American Church, and we have some that don't do anything. They still adhere to Ho-Chunk culture. It was really spiritually based, the way they looked at life. ✹

The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin

A multiyear initiative comes to fruition with a statewide conference May 14–15 at Monona Terrace in Madison.

What opportunities and challenges do we face as we envision a healthy future for Wisconsin farms, rural life, and natural resources? The Wisconsin Academy's Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin project brings all voices to the table to map a sustainable course for a sector that lies at the heart of Wisconsin's economy and identity.

Over the past year, a half-dozen regional forums were held around the state focusing on topics of regional concern. They served as working meetings for a collection of engaged citizens that included farmers, rural leaders, researchers, educators, government agencies, private businesses, farm groups, and environmental interests.

And now we are on the eve of our biggest opportunity yet for citizen engagement and collective thinking. Your voice is needed at the statewide conference in Madison in May. The conference will explore numerous topics under the broad headings of community, food systems, land use and conservation, and production agriculture. Together we will deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture and rural life in Wisconsin. Numerous arts and cultural events prior to and during the conference will celebrate our state's rich rural heritage and the promise of a sustainable future. **Be part of a conversation that will help us all!**

CONFERENCE: Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin, **May 14–15,** Monona Terrace, Madison. One-day options available. **Musical event open to public:** Warren Nelson and his Big Top Chautauqua band, **Mon., May 14,** 7:30 pm. Tickets for concert required, reduced fee for conferees. Info/registration at **www.wisconsinacademy.org/idea.**

EXHIBITION AND EVENTS: "Wisconsin's People on the Land," **April 3–May 20,** James Watrous Gallery in Overture, 201 State Street, Madison. Admission free. Gallery hours: Tu/We/Th 11–5; Fr/Sa 11–9; Su 1–5; Mon. closed. Special hours during conference: Sun., May 13, 1–8 pm, Mon., May 14, 5–7 pm.

Panel and reception: Panel discussion **Fri., April 20,** 7 pm, featuring the artists and exhibition participants Ruth Olson, Michael Bell, and Randall Berndt in lecture hall at Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) in Overture. Reception following panel in MMoCA lobby. Free and non-ticketed event.

Gallery talk: Ben Logan, author of *The Land Remembers*, **Sun., April 29,** 2 pm, in the James Watrous Gallery. Related story on page 10. Free and non-ticketed event.

Concert: The Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society on **Sun., May 13,** 7:30 pm, performs rural-themed music including exhibition-inspired composition by Michael Bell, a rural sociologist, in the MMoCA lecture hall. Ticketed event; see www.wisconsinacademy.org for info.

Gallery talk: Paul Smith, an Oneida, Rhonda Funmaker, a Ho-Chunk, and folklorist Ruth Olson on Native American foodways, **Mon., May 14,** 5:15–6:15 pm, in the James Watrous Gallery. Free and non-ticketed event.

ACADEMY EVENING: The people behind our cover story, the Puentes program—Shaun Judge Duvall, John Rosenow, and Carl Duley—will discuss their work on **Tues., May 8,** 7–8:30 pm, in the MMoCA lecture hall. Free tickets recommended to ensure seating, available one week prior in James Watrous Gallery.

POETRY READING: Winners and runners-up of our statewide poetry contest (theme: farming and rural life) read on **Tues., April 10,** 7–8:30 pm, at Avol's Bookstore, 315 W. Gorham Street, Madison. See page 56 for more info. Free and non-ticketed event.

RELATED EXHIBITION:
"Rural Women: Voice and Spirit," paintings and videotaped interviews with rural women by Kelly Parks Snider and Jane Bartell, **April–June,** Steenbock Gallery of the Wisconsin Academy, 1922 University Avenue, Madison. Admission free.

The Top 10 Ag Innovations

We present some cutting-edge developments you should know about.

Corn gets a new lease on life: the Badger State Ethanol plant in Monroe.

BY ADRIAN CRABB AND GREG LAWLESS

THE HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE is a history of human innovation. From the cultivation of native plants and domestication of wild game to our modern methods of industrial production and global exchange, farmers and other enterprising souls have invented, adapted, invested, traded, and competed to put food on the table.

And so we continue.

In Wisconsin, innovation takes many forms—sometimes in seemingly opposite directions. One dairy farm family with a thousand cows uses anaerobic digestion to transform hazardous waste into clean energy and animal bedding for supplemental income. Across the road, their neighbor seasonally grazes 100 cows and adheres to organic standards in an effort to lower expenses while tapping a high-value niche market.

This article looks at some of the innovations that are redefining agriculture in Wisconsin today.

THE BIOECONOMY

In an agricultural context, a **bioeconomy** is one based on industries and technologies that turn organic matter (feedstocks or biomass) into energy, fuel, chemicals, and materials such as plastic.

With the threat of permanently higher gas prices, with the support of government subsidies, and with technological advances, farmers, scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs are developing new products and new industries that may eventually move us beyond our petroleum-based economy.

1. Biofuel

President George Bush recognized the potential of ethanol as an alternative to petroleum-based fuels in his 2006 State of the Union address. In particular, he singled out cellulosic ethanol. Today in the U.S., ethanol is generally made from the sugar, or starch, contained within a kernel of corn. Cellulosic ethanol can be produced from a variety of sources including agricultural wastes (corn stover, sugar cane bagasse), pulp and saw dust from paper and wood mills, and even such grasses as switchgrass and miscanthus.

Unfortunately, cellulosic ethanol cannot be produced economically to compete with either conventional ethanol or petroleum. To address this, the U.S. Department of Energy recently announced it will allocate $250 million over five years to two research institutions to discover new methods to convert cellulosic material to ethanol more efficiently.[1] The University of Wisconsin–Madison is aggressively competing for those research funds.

While cellulosic ethanol may be some years away, Badger State Ethanol in Monroe is pushing the limits of conventional ethanol production by

squeezing more than just fuel from each kernel of corn.

George Drewrey, a marketing and sales administrator at Badger State Ethanol, says his company is in the process of adding a fractionation plant to its current facility. The plant, which should be up and running this spring, will separate corn kernels into their germ, fiber, and endosperm components, which will be used to make an array of value-added products. The germ will be processed into foods such as corn oil and corn chips. Fiber from kernels will be processed for human consumption as well as for animal feed. Starch from the endosperm will be fermented to produce ethanol, whereas usually the whole kernel is used in that process.

Ethanol from the fractionation plant will increase Badger State Ethanol's total fuel production from 55 million gallons annually to about 65 million gallons. Drewery says that around 230 different products can be made from the corn kernel, and as time goes on the company plans to produce more of these value-added products.

2. Bioenergy

One of the biggest challenges facing Wisconsin livestock producers is the proper handling and disposal of manure. With increasing residential development, less land is available upon which to safely spread the waste, and it is costly to have it hauled off the farm. With the help of improved technologies, innovative farmers are transforming this problem into new income streams.

Anaerobic digesters capture the methane released from manure. The methane can then be burned to generate electricity. Methane is known to be 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.[2] Environmentally, this process is a winner. Anaerobic digestion can reduce manure solids significantly. The remaining bio-solids are an excellent soil amendment, containing higher nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and trace elements than the original manure.[3]

In Wisconsin, there are 16 farm digesters currently operating, representing 5,975 kW of rated capacity, according to Roger Kasper of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). That is enough to power around 4,000 homes. Kasper says that another five farm digesters are under construction or in startup, representing 1,850 kW of rated capacity plus 400 kW of peak capacity. Fifteen additional farm digesters are planned. All of the farms currently running digesters are large dairy operations with between 730 and 3,000 cattle. The exception is a 500,000-duck operation.

Anaerobic digesters capture methane released from manure. The methane, which is 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas, can then be burned to generate electricity.

The estimated market potential of anaerobic digesters in Wisconsin is promising. If all 186 farms in the state with 500 to 999 cows installed digesters, they would generate enough energy to power 22,000 homes.[4] And that is not including the many farms with fewer than 500 or more than 999 cows.

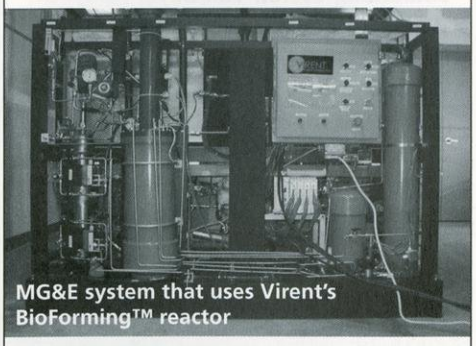
3. Biotechnology

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity defines biotechnology as "any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms, or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for specific use." Applications include medicine, environmental remediation, genetic engineering, genomics, DNA sequencing, protein synthesis, tissue culturing, biopulping, and fermentation using bioreactors.

Wisconsin has been active in biotechnology research in both the public and private sectors. In fact, faculty from numerous UW departments have started their own successful biotech firms.

One such company, near Madison, is Virent Energy Systems Inc. Virent's developers invented the patented "Bioforming" process to convert sugars reaped from substances ranging from paper mill sludge to switchgrass into a slew of high-value chemicals. From these sugars, Bioforming generates hydrogen, natural gas, butane, propane, propylene glycol, and liquid fuels, without any net increase of carbon dioxide. In the future, it may provide a way to produce a gasoline replacement.

Greg Keenan, vice president of business development at Virent, says what makes Bioforming unique is that it relies on a one-step procedure to produce fuels and chemicals in place of the multiple steps used in fermentation. It is also cheaper and works faster than other methods and can adapt as new biomass processing techniques emerge.



MG&E system that uses Virent's BioForming™ reactor

Another unique thing about this technology is that it is scalable. When combined with a system that converts hydrogen from glycerol or sugar into energy, it could power something as small as a laptop computer or as big as several thousand homes. Earlier this year, Madison Gas and Electric (MG&E) purchased a system from Virent to demonstrate a renewable source of energy.

What makes Virent's technology exciting is that it provides a fast, flexible, and cost-effective way to generate fuels from an array of common and renewable biomass sources.

4. Closed-Loop Systems

"State-of-the-art agricultural methods meet revolutionary fuel production techniques in a model of efficiency, environmental responsibility, and ingenuity: the closed-loop system. These two distinct industries support each other in a symbiotic relationship all on one campus."

That is how Wisconsin-based Lafayette BioAg describes a system it developed called Symbiosis. The company is currently raising capital to implement its first closed-loop system in Belmont. The complex is designed around the concept of minimizing waste and environmental impact while maximizing profits from diverse agricultural operations. Its primary inputs will be corn, cattle, and off-site biomass.

In turn, the facility will produce finished beef, ethanol, flowers, distiller's grain, CO_2, ammonia products, electricity, and the raw material for fertilizers. The system is designed to turn its various waste streams into something useful. Tim Baye, Lafayette BioAg's CEO, says that manure from 5,000 head of beef (about 14.1 million gallons' worth per year) will flow into the nation's largest anaerobic digester and produce 2 billion cubic feet of biogas annually. The gas will power boilers and generate enough energy to run the plant and sell electricity to the surrounding power grid. Lafayette BioAg hopes the Belmont facility will create more than 100 jobs. Even though the premise of the whole concept is risk management, some investors have been reluctant because it is still uncharted territory. Now in the final stages of permitting, the company is raising the capital needed to make it happen.

SPECIALTY FOODS

Another area of opportunity is specialty foods. These are foods with distinctive features, targeted toward customers who are willing to pay a premium price for the perceived benefits. Gourmet foods; organic, natural, and health foods; novelty products; and place-based foods are all examples of specialty foods. While a specialty food company may start small with a local customer base, often it must expand to national and international markets to sustain the business.

5. Artisan Dairies

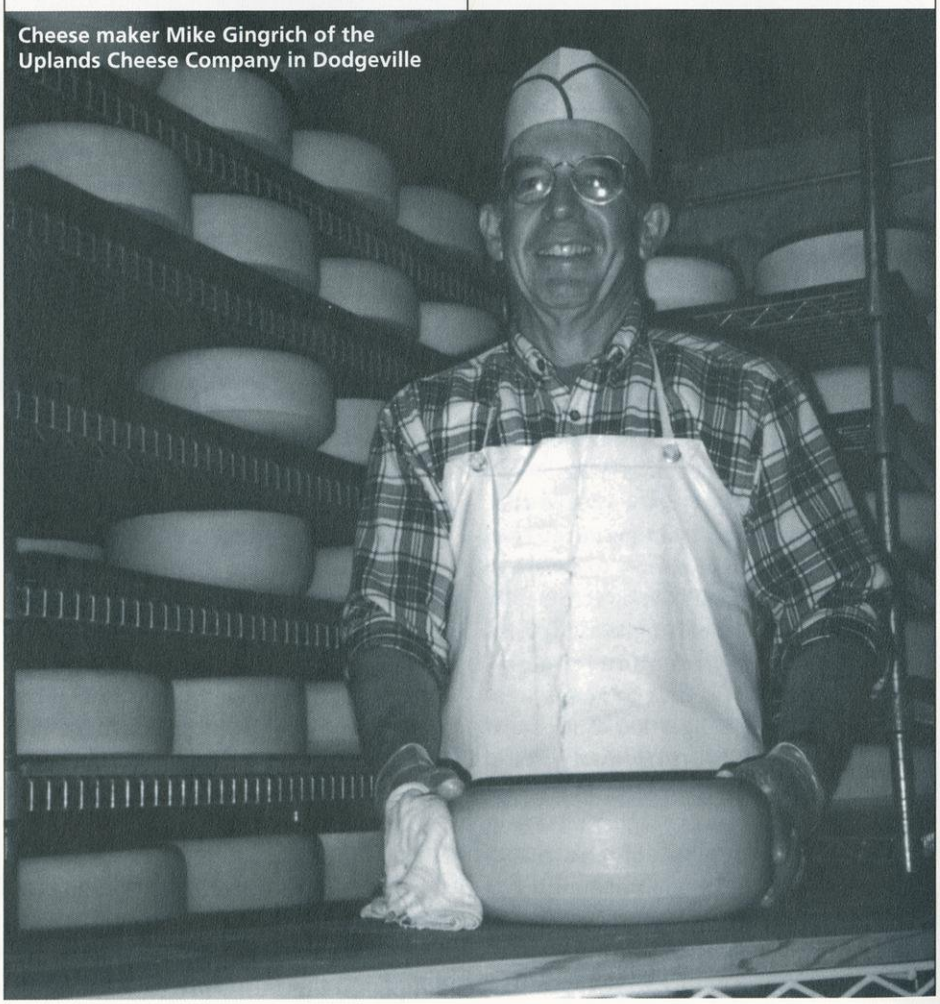
Wisconsin has long been famous for its mass production of dairy products. However, as consumers and chefs across the country demand more unique and gourmet cheeses, Wisconsin cheese makers are increasingly developing these higher value products.

Specialty cheese production rose by 7 percent in 2005, to 355 million pounds, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. That's about 15 percent of Wisconsin's total cheese volume.[5] Specialty cheese, according to the Wisconsin Specialty Cheese Institute, has one or more unique characteristics, with a special emphasis on high quality.

Uplands Cheese Company in Dodgeville is one company that, on the ridges of western Wisconsin, has been producing such cheese since 1994. Uplands Cheese is owned and operated by two families: Mike and Carol Gingrich and Dan and Jeanne Patenaude. They formed Uplands Cheese in 1994 to produce and distribute a cheese they developed using centuries-old techniques that originated in the Alpine provinces of France.

The milk they use in their cheeses has unique flavors due to the grasses, herbs, and wildflowers that the cows graze. To provide this traditional style to the public, they produce and market the cheese themselves under their Pleasant Ridge Reserve label.

Uplands Cheese offers a handcrafted product using ancient techniques that would make French cheesemakers of old proud. For more information about



Cheese maker Mike Gingrich of the Uplands Cheese Company in Dodgeville

Wisconsin's artisan cheeses, visit www.wisconsindairyartisan.com.

6. Organic Foods

Organic foods have become an important part of the food industry in the United States. Every year organic food sales grow by about 20 percent, compared to 2 to 4 percent for the total food industry.[6] What's more, a recent study by the Hartman Group revealed that 23 percent of customers bought organic food at least once per week in 2005. And nearly three-quarters of consumers bought organic food at least sometimes, up 55 percent from 2000.[7] This is good news for dairy farmers who are thinking about switching to organic. Dairy is one of the fastest-growing segments of the organic industry.[8] Many dairy farmers are finding that they can get nearly double their price for dairy products if they go organic.

In 1988, seven organic farmers from western Wisconsin formed a small cooperative, the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP). Starting with organic fruits and vegetables, the cooperative soon branched off into organic dairy products. As the cooperative grew, the farmers expanded their product line and marketed it under the brand name Organic Valley Family of Farms. Organic Valley is now blossoming with 900 farm families and is the largest source of organic milk in the nation. Offering more than 200 products, it is the most successful organic farmer cooperative in the nation.

For more information on organics in Wisconsin, go to the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) website at www.mosesorganic.org.

A huge Wisconsin success story: Food products from Organic Valley

LOCAL MARKETS

The areas of innovation described previously—the bio-conomy and specialty foods—provide opportunities for another area: local markets. Wisconsin consumers represent a significant demand for bio-based fuels and energy, and local markets often provide a friendly environment to test and develop specialty foods.

However, bio-based products and specialty foods often require significant economies of scale and capital investment. Not every farmer has the resources or desire to compete at that level. Fortunately, innovative producers are learning there are profitable, moderate-scale opportunities right in their own backyards.

7. Agritourism

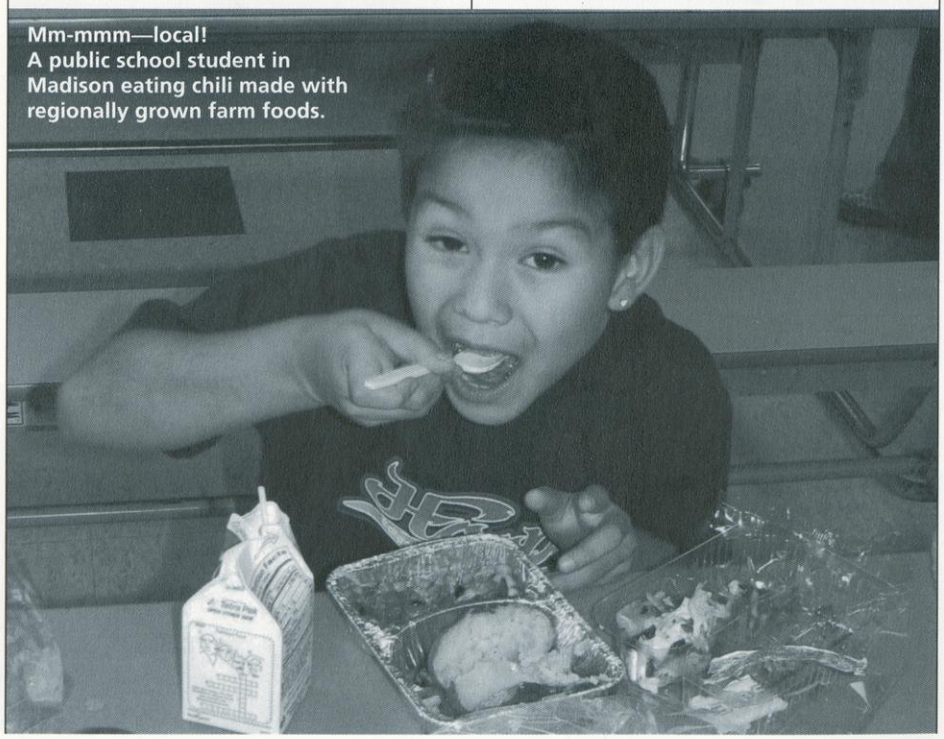
About 28 percent of Wisconsin's population is considered rural. Fewer than 1 percent of us list farming as our primary occupation.[9] Some enterprising farmers have discovered that 72 and 99 percent represent sizable niche markets! And so they offer urban, nonfarm people unique opportunities to experience agriculture and the rural landscape.

Agritourism is very diverse in Wisconsin. Wine tasting, farm tours, country bed and breakfasts, hay rides, U-pick farms, and roadside farm stands are all examples of agritourism. Some conventional dairy farms invite the public to tour their operation for an entrance fee. Elaborate corn mazes are part of a growing trend that some people call agri-entertainment.

An example of the latter is Schuster's Playtime Farm in Deerfield. Started as a pumpkin farm, Don and Theresa Schuster have expanded the operation to include a nine-acre corn maze, a petting zoo, and a renovated historic round barn.

The petting zoo features miniature donkeys, alpine and fainting goats, Baby Dahl lambs, llamas, and pygmy goats, to name a few. "The corn maze is designed for kids and adults. Of course, kids love the petting zoo, but adults are amused by it, too," says Don. Group gatherings for corporations, churches, birthday parties, and clubs are also welcome. Their website explains, "Our corn maze works naturally for a team-building experience."

One popular annual event, the haunted forest, is not for the faint of heart. The "black hole," for example, is an obstacle in the forest that succeeds in making its victims feel like they are



Mm-mmm—local! A public school student in Madison eating chili made with regionally grown farm foods.

walking upside down. "I've had adults come up to me and say they wet their pants in the haunted forest. I know it's good when I hear that," says Don.

Marketing is key to a successful agritourism business, and the Schusters are masters of low-cost promotion. They once loaned their potbellied pig to the local school for a fundraising pig-kissing contest. They let their church borrow their donkeys for a Lenten parade. Both resulted in color photos in the local press. They also had their farm featured as a video clue on the game show "Jeopardy."

8. Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is all about building long-term rapport and loyalty with your customers. It requires intensive, truly personal communication and consistent attention to customer needs, whether they are individual consumers or such businesses as restaurants and grocery stores. Customer retention is fundamental to this approach, which often involves a central story or theme that appeals to the values and needs of the customer.

Whether they know it or not, a growing number of Wisconsin farmers are implementing relationship marketing through such approaches as community-supported agriculture (CSA), where customers "join" a vegetable farm by paying a lump sum up front and receive a weekly shipment of seasonal produce. The "story" may combine a history of the farm and the family, along with an explanation of their distinctive production practices.

Some dairy producers are trying to apply these concepts to their business. Crystal Ball Organic Dairy in Osceola is delivering fresh milk to people's doorsteps as part of a multifaceted plan to build relationships with customers.

Troy DeRosier, Crystal Ball's owner, milks 100 Holstein cattle and processes the milk right at the farm. He sells premium quality organic milk from their on-site store and runs a delivery route in a 40-mile radius around the farm. In addition, regional grocery stores as far away as Milwaukee buy Crystal Ball products through a distributor.

Currently the on-site store is Crystal Ball's best retailer, where customers can buy glass-bottled milk, butter, cheese curds, and farmstead ice cream. This personal contact between farmers and the customers is an important part of building long-lasting relationships.

9. Ethnic Marketing

When ethnic groups emigrate to the United States, they often desire some of the same foods that they were accustomed to in their home country. Sometimes, however, immigrants find it difficult to find what they are looking for. And if they do find it, often it isn't fresh or has to be shipped far distances. In western Wisconsin, for example, there is a growing population of immigrants who want fresh goat meat.

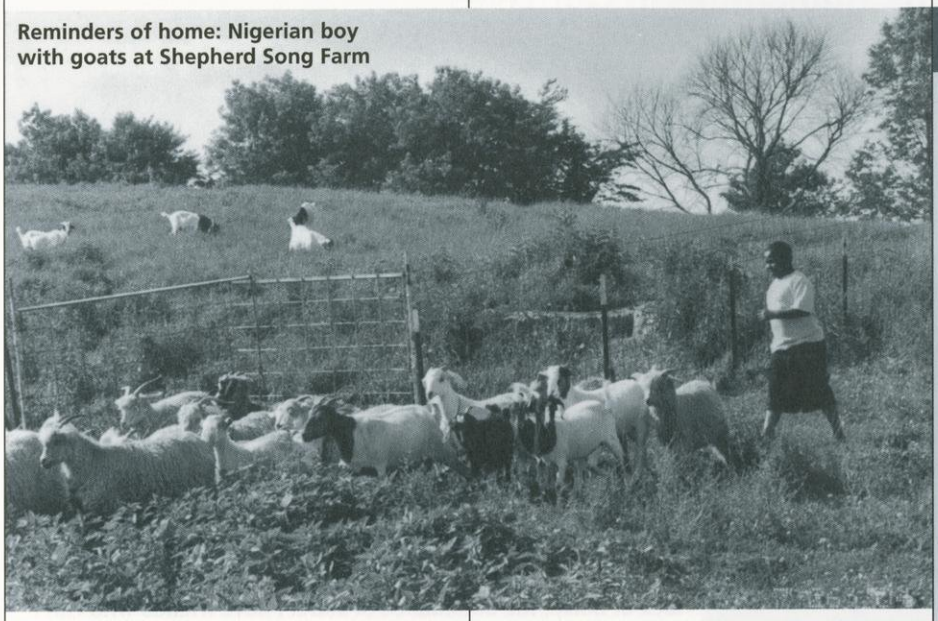
People from diverse ethnic backgrounds heard about Shepherd Song Farm, owned by Larry Jacoby and Judy Moses, through word of mouth. Intrigued by the idea of fresh goat, lamb, and chicken, people started coming to the farm, near Connorsville, seeking food that reminded them of home. Moses says she has served customers from places such as Russia, Turkey, France, Ethiopia, Mexico, and Somalia, to name a few.

Moses explains that many of the Somalis in the area, being Muslim, require meat to be halal, or in line with Islamic dietary practices. So the Jacobys haul their goats to an established USDA halal slaughter facility in Illinois, though they have done local halal slaughters with state religious exemption on a small scale. Some families buy goats or sheep and can do the slaughtering themselves. Shepherd Song Farm's biggest sellers are in fact live animals. But with the help of a pair of grants from the USDA, Jacoby and Moses hope to change that by devel-

That's agri-tainment! A family gathers pumpkins at Schuster's Playtime Farm near Deerfield.

The milkman cometh: Troy DeRosier of Crystal Ball Organic Dairy.

Photo by Ben Schultz



Reminders of home: Nigerian boy with goats at Shepherd Song Farm

oping value-added products that will satisfy their customers' longing for something familiar.

10. Local Food Systems

In a world where much of our food is brought in from long distances, a growing number of farmers and other advocates are promoting local food systems as a way for individuals and institutions to purchase their food supply locally. They see it as an important principle in sustainability, with the prospect of supporting the local economy while cutting down on transportation costs and pollution. They point out that locally produced food is often more flavorful and nutritious because it is fresher.

Local food system advocates have focused much of their efforts on public school systems. Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch, based in Madison, is one such program. The organization's goal is to "enhance the Madison public schools' existing meal programs by introducing fresh, nutritious, local, and sustainably grown food to children, beginning in the city's elementary schools."

While the project has yet to provide full-scale lunches to Madison's schoolkids, it has provided fresh, healthy snacks produced on nearby farms to 1,700 schoolkids per week in 2006, says Doug Wubben, project coordinator for Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch. Madison Metropolitan School District's Food Service also plans to use local chopped peppers and diced potatoes from a local food co-op's kitchen in chili and soup. But it is not just abut bringing in healthy food to kids. It is also about developing stable markets for the producers and processors of those foods.

For a new directory of dozens of diverse efforts across Wisconsin to increase local consumption of local farm products, visit http://aic.uwex.edu/local-food.cfm.

Theodore Levitt, editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, once wrote that "*Creativity* is thinking up new things. *Innovation* is doing new things."

In Wisconsin, innovative farmers, scientists, and other pioneers are doing things today that will guide the evolution of agriculture in our state. And so we continue. ✹

Greg Lawless is co-director of the Agricultural Innovation Center, a partnership project of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; the University of Wisconsin–Extension; and the Wisconsin Technical College System. Adrian Crabb was an undergraduate research assistant. The AIC is also an active member of the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network. More information at http://aic.uwex.edu.

Notes

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3. Cooperative Extension Service. 2001. Anaerobic Digesters and Methane Production Questions That Need to Be Asked and Answered Before Investing Your Money. Publication #A3766. University of Wisconsin, Discovery Farms.

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9. USDA Economic Research Service, State Fact Sheets: Wisconsin. 2006. http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/WI.HTM.

The Humanities in Our Lives

A special section from the Wisconsin Humanities Council

For the past year, the Wisconsin Humanities Council has provided a special section exploring the humanities for *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. The humanities seek answers about who we are, where we have been, what we value—and why. At the WHC, we believe that such exploration is essential for a healthy human community. For this, our final installment, we're joining in this issue's theme by asking five noted (and rural) Wisconsin authors to explore the question: Why do you live where you live? The Wisconsin Humanities Council and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters will continue to collaborate on many initiatives in the future. We hope our complementary missions make this partnership an always fruitful and rewarding enterprise for the citizens of our state. *—Dean Bakopoulos, novelist and executive director, Wisconsin Humanities Council*

Photo by Amanda Okopski

A Place That I Love

BY DEAN BAKOPOULOS

Thanks, possibly, to human arrogance and a blatant disregard for the planet we inhabit, the beginning of January was downright balmy by Wisconsin standards. One late morning, the air moist with unexpected warmth, I took my dog for a walk in the Mine Hill Prairie, a smallish nature preserve at the foot of the hill where I live in Mineral Point, Wisconsin.

As my dog and I walked along the path that balmy January morning, I made a deliberate effort to go slowly—to actually stop and notice as much as I could about the place I was walking. Not just the majestic sights—the ancient bur oak, the light on the distant ridge, the outcroppings of stone, the shock of six white-tails sprinting across a distant field—but the smaller details: pods, bramble, scat. I am not a slow walker by nature; I don't do anything slowly, in fact. I eat too fast, dance too fast, and write too fast. I talk too fast, so that sometimes my words run together in a thick mumble.

Such walking was not easy.

As my dog trotted along, almost spastic with joy, instinctively knowing how to move and what to smell in this quiet space, I realized that, while he knew exactly how to be in and part of the land, I was an ignorant human full of questions: What were those called, I thought, pointing to three gnarled, squat, twisted trees growing out of a hillside? What sort of pod is this on the ground? What is that bird I hear, and what is it saying? Is that the creak of a branch straining in the wind, or the faint cry of a wounded rabbit?

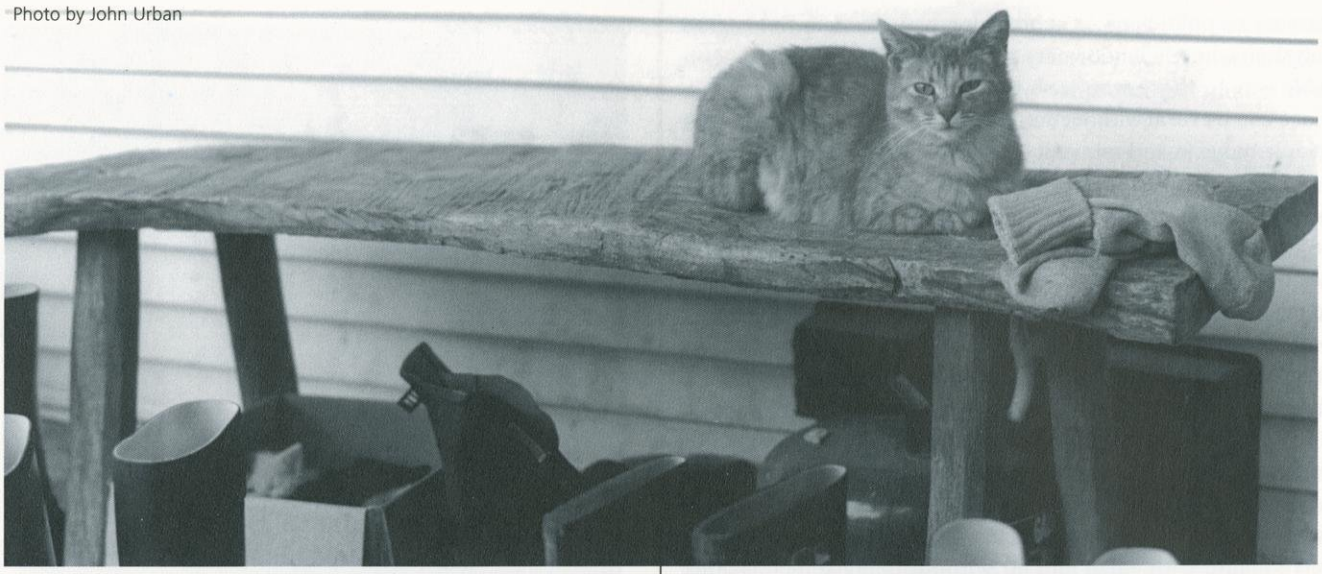
I am not a rural guy by training. I've lived in cities all of my life, learned to drive on congested freeways, jostled for parking spots at shopping malls, and always took my walks along urban corridors, But I have to admit—I do not miss cities. Rural life is quieter than any life I've ever experienced. I stay home more. If I do leave the house after dark, I am amazed by the emptiness of the streets, the lack of traffic, the lack of noise, the abundance of stars. I have friends who can't comprehend a life without the buzz of business and the luxury of lattes and ethnic restaurants on every corner. But for the first time in my life, I live in a place that I love rather than a place where I've landed, and it makes getting up in the morning a kind of adventure. What will I discover today? Who will I meet? What will the sky look like at dusk? Will deer make their run through our yard as we're settling down to dinner?

My wife and daughter and I moved to Mineral Point, I confess, fueled by impulse and whim. We fell in love with High Street, the main thoroughfare of its well-preserved downtown, which is lined with shops, art galleries, restaurants, and, of course, many fine taverns. We fell in love with the friendliness of the people, the waves and smiles and offers of help that seemed to greet us the instant we arrived. We fell in love with our old house, surrounded by space and trees, and built more than 100 years ago by a German immigrant farmer who'd just gotten back to Wisconsin after trying his luck at the Gold Rush out west.

But what I love the most about my new home, and what inspires me each morning when I wake up in my new town, is the beauty of the hills, the reassuring reach of the trees, and the expanses of ever-changing field and prairie that surround us. I wake up early each morning and go to my writing desk, and sometime, usually around the time when I am getting my second or third cup of coffee, I will look out the kitchen window to the east of town and see a sunrise so rich with pinks and purples and oranges that I just spend a long time gazing out the window in stillness. About this time, from the upper level of our house, I often hear my young daughter waking up to start the day. I hear my wife showing her the sunrise, and I hear my daughter say "Ooh" or "Wow."

It is not uncommon for writers to live in rural places; for one, most writers don't have to worry about a morning commute and most of them do not have to regularly deal with such modern professional trappings as HR offices, brown bag seminars, and budget meetings. Still, many of our noted and most celebrated writers crowd into the great American cities—New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Los Angeles,

Photo by John Urban



Seattle, etc.—where they can take part in the cocktail parties, the urbane and sophisticated wit of their peers, the museums and bookstores and cafes. It is, I confess, what I once believed the literary life was all about. But now I side more with the writers who long for quiet, who want to live out of the way, who decide that the public library on Main Street is enough of a literary scene for them, and who, instead of power lunches and nightclubs, prefer to spend their nonwriting moments gazing out the window to say "ooh" or "wow."

For this special issue of *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, the Wisconsin Humanities Council asked four of our state's great writers—two from the southern part of the state, and two from the northern half—to tell us why they live where they live, what they love about it, and what they fear they might be losing.

Photo by Robert Laemle

Rurburbia

BY JANE HAMILTON

A few years ago, not far from the apple orchard where I live, the local health care provider built a gym, the type of fantastical, equipment-studded shrine that metropolitan area dwellers are used to and accept as part of their landscape. There had never been anything as lavishly suburban in our community, and I guess it's not surprising that people joined up as if they had been starving for movement and at last could get some. Our township is one of the fastest-growing townships in Racine County, and although many of us consider that unfortunate rather than a point of pride, the gym seems like one of the benefits of growth. I am still seized with fresh incredulity and appreciation every time I drive into the parking lot, which is about four times a week these days.

One of the classes I take at the gym, or rather, one of my addictions, is spin. In spin you sit on one of the 15 stationary bikes in a darkened room. The dominatrix up front in her little shorts and sports bra plays earsplitting music and cracks her whip: thus we pedal in a fury. For 50 minutes she barks her commands but sometimes she waxes poetical, suggesting that we imagine climbing a hill, that we feel the breeze and enjoy the rolling pastureland. The room has no windows and is filled with the beat of her music. I have an ironclad rule that I will not spin without earplugs, as I would still like to be able to hear the wood thrush if I make it to an advanced age. What I love about spin is the fact that afterward you feel as if all your parts have been oiled. And you can do this exercise with your eyes closed; sealed off in this way, eyes shut tight, ears plugged, you can think about a few things.

I don't very often admit that I go to spin class or even to the gym. I live on a farm with plenty of space to run and walk, and in the winter, ski. Also, there is manual labor to be done at all seasons and so exercising for no useful purpose feels sinfully indulgent. Not only does it feel wrong to me as a writer and as the wife of a farmer, most of all it feels wrong as myself, as someone who is privileged to live in a spot where it has been possible to be deeply connected to the natural world.

Like so many towns in all our states, our township, too, is on the verge of becoming suburbia: rurburbia, it is right now. Many residents want to maintain the rural flavor, but there does not seem to be the will or the vision on the part of the

farmers or politicians or subdivision homeowners to imagine a system wherein landowners could pass their land in an equitable way to those who wish to farm. It seems unlikely that a place can be rural without active farming, unless enough horse people move in and reinvent it as an equine township.

As the town becomes built up it is naturally harder to find quiet and darkness. A house, much to our surprise, was recently built in the woods behind our home. I suppose this is not to be counted a tragedy in the big scheme, but it feels so to me; where once there was the black of night I see the lights of an enormous house. And the place I used to camp in summer, by the lot line, is now ruined for that purpose. One of the results for me of all the change around us is that I have to find smaller and smaller parts of the natural world that will serve as "nature." I have to be deliberate about where I look, what my scope is, and I have to use no small amount of energy to block out the hum of rurburbia. That is, I no longer have a relationship with earth and air without being self-conscious about it. The affects of this altered relationship are a spiritual fatigue and a continuous low-grade sadness.

Photo by John Urban

Aldo Leopold is reported to have said to a friend that nothing could be done about conservation "without creating a new kind of people." There are a few committed citizens in the township who might qualify as that new breed, those few who have patiently tried to radicalize the community in order to save it. There is enough greed and fear and inertia, however, to make the job seem practically impossible. Educating the community and building consensus or even getting enough people to pay attention is a slower process than getting the all clear from the town board to build ill-conceived subdivisions. I sometimes wonder if I've thrown in the towel, if I go to spin class in anticipation of the climate dome, or in anticipation of the time when for any number of reasons my family might have to cash out. These are the things I think of in spin as I pedal and pedal up that imaginary hill on a road that is designated "rustic."

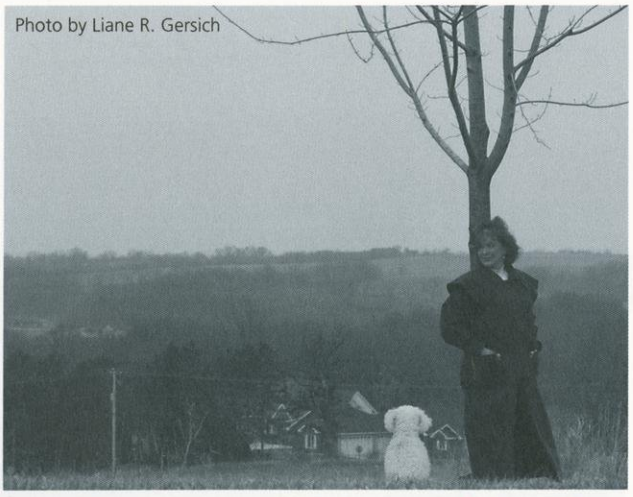


Photo by Liane R. Gersich

Landscape With Prairie Fire

BY JACQUELYN MITCHARD

I don't get out much.

So the night that the Oregon Fire Department turned out in full force to burn our prairie—all 40 acres, in order that it would spring back with 1,500 plants, from foxtail to Indian grass, purple aster and wild bergamot, the following season—that was a big night.

Back at the station, there must have been only a skeleton crew, because three trucks, two ambulances, and a few cars lined the drive. And when the whole dry expanse went up at once with a whoosh, we sat huddled behind our second-story windows and exclaimed with delight, front row at the fireworks display.

Our grown son and our neighbors drove over to sit on the hill, watch the show, and especially savor the scent, which, for many of us, recalls childhood like no other single sensation.

The next night my three-year-old son asked, "Mom, can we please have that fire again?"

We won't, not for two more years, because that's what it takes to keep a prairie healthy. But we have a fire pit, around which we sit and talk of nothing, and trails, along which we ski cross-country, and fox who trot up the driveway with their kits (our dog is blasé and no longer even barks), and deer that melt like shadows into the bur oaks at dusk and wild turkeys that walk up and tap at the glass when I'm walking on my treadmill and hawks that enliven my dawn.

They aren't ours—none of these things, even the prairie grasses. But we're their temporary guardians. If we're very lucky, they'll outlast us, not becoming 17th greens and 4th holes. And they aren't Central Park. But they're a damned sight better than the street corner under the El tracks where I grew up. To have claimed them—for a while, for my kids—makes me feel like Emily Dickinson, who wrote, "I never saw a moor/Nor visited in heaven/Yet certain am I of the spot/As if the chart were given."

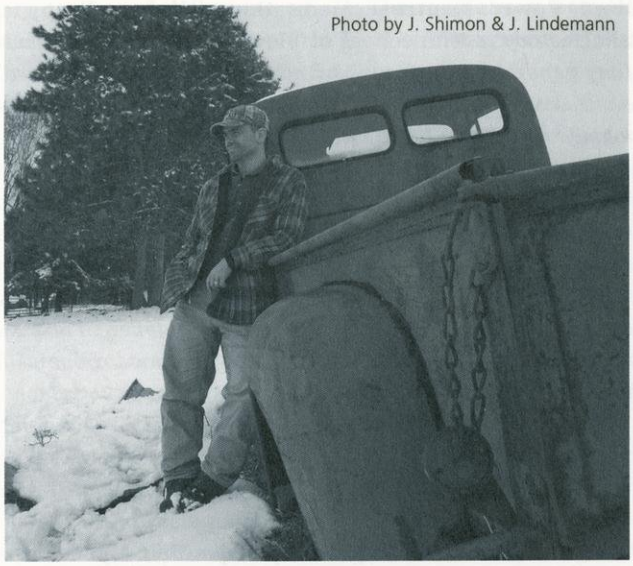


Photo by J. Shimon & J. Lindemann

Down the Road a Piece

BY MICHAEL PERRY

Why I live where I live is my koan of the moment, and it is a real cud-chewer because right now all my stuff is in boxes. We are packed up and moving. Not far—you can throw in your *Essential Steve Earle*, go the speed limit and arrive well before "Continental Trailways Blues"—but it feels far, because I am leaving a place that saturates my heart and bones and wherever else ineffable longings lodge (speaking in the symptomatic present, I would include the tummy). I hit this locale in diapers and departed at the age of emancipation. Spent a dozen years away, then returned. Twelve years into my second citizenship, I am settled and content within the rough bounds of an area framed largely in terms of memories and gratitude. Over half my life, I have happily punctuated my return address with the same zip code, the nicely rhythmic *five-four-seven, five-seven.* New Auburn, Wisconsin. The idea of forwarding the mail leaves me queasy and blue.

It would be sweet to noodle along in this minor key, but I'm stopping now because having pried my eyes from the compass mounted in my navel, I see the world is gray with the dust of diaspora and displacement. Any given moment, put your ear to the earth, and you will hear ten million shifting feet. Vicious herdings and abject decampments, perpetually under way and commenced at the business end of boots, bullets, and bulldozers. Whereas we are simply easing down the road a piece. Given the great gifts of free will and freedom, one should keep the mewling to a minimum.

Regarding the imminent voyage, I would like to present some sort of grand charter, but the whole deal is predicated mainly on the idea of having chickens. We are not alone in this, as These Troubled Times seem to have precipitated a fowl renaissance. Drop the term *chicken tractor* and behold the knowing nods. The subject was raised between my wife and me fairly early in our courtship, and has sustained us. We are enthused by the idea of fresh eggs, homegrown coq au vin, and (at least until butchering day) a 24-hour turnaround on the compost. In addition, it is my longstanding opinion that entertainment-wise, chickens beat TV.

The move is also family-driven. We are assuming responsibility for a farmstead previously owned by my wife's mother. Faced with an unexpected move, she wants to keep the place in the family. And in a bit of a flip, we are moving from a village to the country in order that my wife might be closer to the university where she sometimes teaches. This will save gas and time, although that glow on the horizon is a mall and whenever we notice a Prime Commercial sign planted one forty-acre patch nearer, we review our escape plan from a place on which we have yet to pay property tax.

We are also going rural in the hope that we might become more self-sufficient in terms of firewood, an expanded garden, and perhaps a pair of pigs. Through previous visits our six-year-old can already identify a coyote track (batten down the chicken tractor!), and I intend to see to it that she carry the phrase "slop the hogs" one generation further. To that extent, my wife and I are acting on positive recollections of our farm-based raising. But I hope I don't burden the youngsters with the idea that *rural* equals *righteous*. As a country kid, it took me a while to round the bend on that one, but thanks to a blend of peak oil posts, Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*, and a bodega in Bushwick, I am well on my way to reconstructing all residual prejudice.

This new place is in hilly terrain, and when I go there I find myself reflexively checking the windshield to verify that my state park stickers are up-to-date. Having been raised a swamp and flatlands boy, I view all topographical rumples as exotic. I am more attuned to brush than vistas. When I walk the ridge, I can't help but remember all those Louis L'Amour books I read, where some fool skylines himself and gets culled by a Sharps 50. When we were tots my friend Harley was orphaned by a tractor when it pitched down a hill and crushed his father, and I have conflated hills, farms, and danger ever since.

The ridge runs from the house at an angle straying off the east-west axis. As a result, the first time I came here I got my directions wrong, and I'm still trying to rewire. My disorientation is exacerbated by the fact that some of the outbuildings align with the ridge, while others are set square to the four directions. I am regularly startled by the apparent repositioning of sunrise.

I am nervous about some of the newer houses nearby. They tend to be grand. Again, I must disabuse myself of reverse classism—neurologists want chickens too—but I cherish a regular salting of trash heaps and trailers, signaling as they do that the neighborhood will tolerate bad luck and alternative preference. Soothingly, the house into which we are moving is a bit of a happy mishmash, built in sometimes amateur stages from a one-room log cabin into its present conglomeration, best summarized by the fact that the screen door does not latch and you can entertain yourself during downtime by dropping a glass marble beside the toilet and quietly betting as to whether or not it will clear the tub surround and roll right out

the door. Here in New Auburn, I know my old house by heart and can pass through it in the dark with never a bump. I am loathe to leave, but have been doing little things to wean myself. Picked out a deer stand. Found some hog panels. And talked to an officer with the local fire department. He says they can use a hand. That'll help.

We have a baby coming soon, and hope to deliver at home. A flatlander's child, due to be born in the hills. The little creature will emerge and find its place. Locate the sun. Incorporate the compass. These things happen slow, the way a cherry tree grows around barbwire. For 28 of my 42 years I have been allowed to stand in one place, and I can carry it within me now, wherever I go. Now it is time to let my children grow. At some point I will sit down and stare across the new landscape with a museful mug, and ask *Why do I live where I live?*, and the answer will be a firm two-parter: *Silly question. Rejoice, dinglefritz, and feed the chickens.*

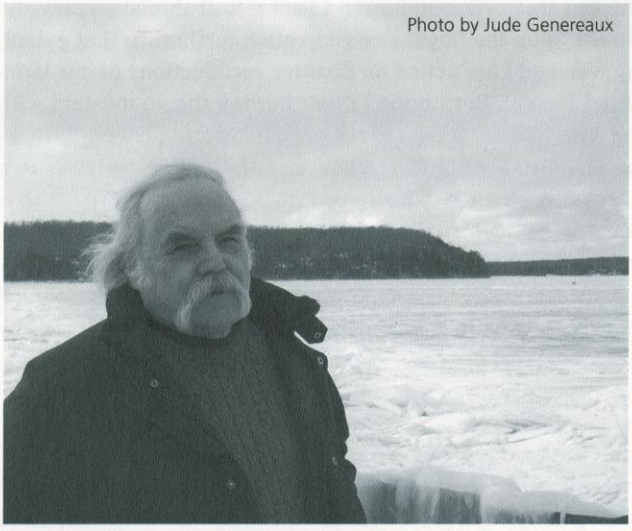


Photo by Jude Genereaux

Rescued at Death's Door

BY NORBERT BLEI

Why do I live where I live?

It's a question in search of an answer, and one that I asked myself every day almost 40 years ago when I first moved from Chicago to Door County—and kept asking for years afterward.

I was running from the '60s then. "Back to the land" was the cry, though I really had no acquaintance with the land other than backyard gardens, prairie lots, city parks, forest preserves, and boyhood summers on a farm in Michigan where my Czechoslovak /Hungarian/Yugoslavian grandparents, born in the Old Country, moved to, suddenly, unexplainably, in the 1940s, abandoning an ethnic Chicago neighborhood to return to the rural.

America was in turmoil in my time of letting go. Chicago was on fire—again. Antiwar protest ("Hey! Hey! LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?"). Police brutality (the '68 Democratic convention). Civil disobedience ("Hell no, we won't go!"). Flower Power: Mantra ... Meditation ... Holy ... Hippy ... Hallucinatory ... with echoes of "Howl" (*"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix..."*) It was time to Beat a hasty retreat.

I remember walking out of a neighborhood tavern one night after too many boilermakers and much bullshit about busting heads, blacks, long-haired hippies, Commies, and sniper-fire on a downtown expressway. I remember burrowing down the midnight alleys to the apartment thinking: *I'm letting my hair grow even longer. I'm getting the hell out off here. I'm done with teaching, with politics, with the neighborhood. Done with the city.*

No job, no money, no prospects, the cost of city living on the rise. A wife, two kids, a full set of understandably upset parents and in-laws. I'd learn to live on less, accept fewer distractions/attractions and write from elsewhere, though Chicago was hard to relinquish. My inspiration. My lifeline—writing for all the city newspapers and magazines. Cavorting with *my* kind of people: reporters, poets, artists, novelists, editors, "characters." Finding *my* place with words in a city I loved. Working out of a basement storage shed "office" beneath the apartment. Learning to write and have it both ways: the art of fiction, the bread-and-butter of nonfiction. With the hope of someday honoring Chicago's grand literary tradition. To add just *one* small chapter or a paragraph to Sandburg's "city of the big shoulders"—fame enough.

Instead, I drove off, "dropped out"—another condition of the culture of those times. I did what Midwesterners have always done when life becomes too much: headed north. Back to nature. I stuffed Thoreau in the trunk along with a bunch of other writers I thought would help.

Escape to Wisconsin, read many of the bumper stickers. And I did. All the way up to the rugged tip of the Door Peninsula jutting out into the great Lake Michigan. So close you could hear the foghorn off Plum Island, the ice cracking on the bay in winter, fishtugs chugging out in the early morning, a rooster at the crack of dawn. I studied the territory.

Porte des Morts (Death's Door) passage, the graveyard of shipwrecks, in my backyard. The perfect metaphor. (I came to understand.) Exactly where I found myself. Two small kids. An uncertain wife. Distant neighbors. Remnants of an old Scandinavian culture all around me, folks of few words who kept to themselves. I knew no one. These were not my people. What the hell was I doing here? The nights were pitch-black. Silence settled in and stole everything but your heartbeat. Depression entered the scene. And winter was still six months away.

Five acres of woods, a dead cherry orchard, an old farmhouse, a garage, woodshed, outhouse, and remnants of an old chicken coop on a dead-end road. All mine, for next to nothing—though I carried a $33-a-month mortgage at the local bank for many years. Which was often difficult to come up with, there being no work for me in this No Man's Land where I had dropped out to, back to, in hopes of finding myself.

A period of adjustment. For more than 10 years I lived on the road between places, from Chicago to Door County: the

city, the country, flashing by me. The road ahead from the windshield, the road behind from the rearview mirror. Crossing the Sturgeon Bay Bridge one way, crossing the Michigan Avenue bridge the other. Knowing where all the stories were down there; bringing them back here alive, to write, to send back there to be published—and then wait up here for the money to pay the mortgage and other bills. In the city I was my old self again, could talk the talk. Write it, too. Here I was solemn, solitary, somebody I didn't know, searching to find the language to express what I felt: lost. Not even sure I wanted to be found.

It took years to be rescued in the rural by the people and the landscape through the word. I've told that story before, many times, many ways. And still have more to tell. But not now.

Nineteen books and almost 40 years later I am closer to understanding why I am still here and why I have come to love this place. Springing Thoreau from the trunk of the car upon my arrival in 1969 was maybe the beginning. Getting to know the land, the nearness and preciousness of open water surrounding me, was another dimension. Seasons became my timepiece. The hours and the minute hand, useless. I could sing of the sanctity of silence (for writing) but I won't—or not too loudly. And when the people (*my* people) began to appear, it soon became evident, though fisherman, farmer, migrant, Islander ... Swede, Norwegian, German, Belgian ... I was not that far removed from my old Chicago neighborhood. All our stories are the same. If only we listen.

The children grew and left for greener pastures, still making stories of their own. With their departure, and after a very long marriage, the husband and wife discovered that though opposites may attract, there's something to be said, lived, discovered in the separate differences of a bond of two that had to be broken for both man and woman to survive—in two different places. She, back to an urban culture denied her, given the cards dealt to me that I had made her play. Me, rooted firmer, deeper than ever in a rural landscape that continues to take me places I've never been, anxious to tell all with passion upon my return. ✺

Pilot Island Lighthouse in Door County

Photo courtesy of the Door County Visitor Bureau, www.DoorCounty.com

poetry contest winners

Poetry Contest 2007

ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS

FIRST PLACE

"Tether," by Joel Friederich, Sarona

Winner of the John Lehman Poetry Award

Prizes: $500 and a CD recording session at Abella Studios, Madison

SECOND PLACE

"Lilac Gardens," by Sara Parrell, Madison

Prizes: $100 and a $100 "Color It Green" gift certificate from McKay Nursery, Madison

THIRD PLACE

"Happiness, Still," by Kay N. Sanders, Oshkosh

Prize: $50

Winners and runners-up reading on Tues., April 10, 7–8:30 pm at Avol's Bookstore, 315 W. Gorham Street, Madison

This year's *Wisconsin People & Ideas* Poetry Contest for the first time had a theme—farming and rural life in Wisconsin. We asked contestants to compose "poetry of place" in honor of Wisconsin's agricultural and small-town heritage as well as its present and future. What we were hoping for was a poetic reflection on the themes and issues being explored in our Wisconsin Idea project, the Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin.

We got what we'd hoped for. While we did not receive as many entries as we do for an unthemed contest—just over 100 entries, as opposed to more than 250 last year—the quality more than made up for the quantity. Early skeptics of the themed contest—those who questioned why we would place such shackles on poetic inspiration—later declared themselves very impressed with the results.

Picking the winners proved as challenging as ever. We would like to thank our judges, Mary Wehner, Charles Ries, Jeannie Bergmann—and especially our lead judge, Bruce Taylor—for their time and dedication. Our poetry editor and contest sponsor, John Lehman, deserves special thanks for his hard work and unflagging devotion. Thanks, too, to The Reader's Loft in Green Bay and Avol's Bookstore in Madison for their monetary support, to Avol's for also hosting our winners' reading, and to Abella Studios and McKay Nursery in Madison for their prize contributions.

In this issue we invite you to enjoy the winning poems as well as an additional selection by each prize poet. We are also pleased to announce our 10 runners-up, whose work will be published in our summer issue. Says lead judge Bruce Taylor of the runners-up, "Many of these poems, with a tinker here and there, could have 'placed' rather than 'shown.' But what a show it is. Poetry is alive and very well in Wisconsin, thank you!"

They are (in alphabetical order by poet):

"Trespassing," David Camphouse, Milwaukee
"Wishful," Charles Cantrell, Madison
"Real Maple," Geoff Collins, Marshall
"One October," CX Dillhunt, Madison
"Progress," Jessica Eskelsen, Milwaukee
"On Being a Farm Kid," Kathryn Gahl, Two Rivers
"Hay Season," Nancy Jesse, Madison
"Small Farming in Iowa County," Bruce Noble, Madison
"Friday Nights the Whole Town Goes to the Basketball Games," Teresa Scollon, Madison
"A Different Kind of Religion," Victor A. Streeby, Sheboygan Falls

Look for their works this summer!

THE JUDGE'S WORDS

Lead judge Bruce Taylor on "Tether"

Don't you love the strophe of this poem, the stroke of it, the way the vertical energy driven by the "ings"—tumbles along the single sentence down the page, barely impeded by the short, two- or three-beat lines. This poem closes and opens and closes again, like a fist or a lung, or a heart.

I reach down with this poem into what Roethke called "the muck and the mire," what the poem calls "the black buried heart," "its slippery upper slopes," and like the poem I am surprised and thrilled and more than a little frightened of what I find.

JOEL FRIEDERICH

1ST PLACE WINNER

JOHN LEHMAN POETRY AWARD

Tether

Something alive just
brushed against your thumb
so you're reaching down
farther than you can see

you're grasping you're getting
a grip on its slippery upper
folds its tangled shoots
you're seizing it gathering in

its thick stems closer
to the root you're pulling
your whole self down
to the cool body it grows from

wedging a hold on the dark
weight leveraging up a part
of the soft muscle it yields
one tendon at a time its clutch

on the black buried heart
you reach into the whole
tethered mass veined and
sinewed into earth's anatomy

down where you can't breathe
it's taking your whole weight
it's pulling you into separate
selves it's tearing you from

the air where you were born
you're tearing it from itself—
both inseparably joined each
dragging the other one home.

by Joel Friederich

Heat Lightning

My mother built a screened-in porch
with a clear view of the west
just so she could sit in a glider
and keep an eye on the slow progress
of thunderstorms through the late afternoon,
how they rise from the next county
and by evening swell in flashing towers.

Maybe it's become her image of death—
the long buildup when nothing happens
except blackbirds flapping over cornstalks,
the light thickening and air growing still
as even insects decide it's time
for holiness. Then the sudden tearing
loose from the world and being
swallowed in a wind beyond imagining.
Or maybe it's just better than anything
in the static of her TV, or a comfort
to know the worst can be survived.

Afterwards, in a cloudless night,
the western sky blinks heat lightning.
With no apparent source, it must be
electric residue swirling in the storm's wake,
images left crackling in the air
where the dying have recently passed,
the world refusing to calm down
even after you're gone.

by Joel Friederich

Joel Friederich lives in Sarona in northwestern Wisconsin and teaches at the University of Wisconsin–Rice Lake. He has published two collections of poetry, both award-winning chapbooks: *Without Us* (Finishing Line Press) and *The Body We Gather* (Kulupi Press). Individual poems have appeared in such literary journals as *The Paris Review, Prairie Schooner, Witness, Sou'wester,* and many others.

When asked why he wished to write about farming and rural life, Friederich responded:

"I was led to write 'Tether' and other poems related to farming and rural life by my interest in themes of disappearance—the way a dropped stone disappears in water, the way words disappear when spoken. This passage from known into unknown, from graspable to buried and back again, gives energy, releases breath, and is a central mystery I look for in art. Farming, the hand reaching down into dirt to grasp mysteries, is a source for such life-giving transformations."

THE JUDGE'S WORDS

Lead judge Bruce Taylor on "Lilac Gardens"

A story is not necessarily a poem, neither is a vignette nor a scene, though they may try to pass themselves off as one. But here it is the ordinary words used in extraordinary ways, the grace of it going from here to there, and not just the story but the backstory and the portent of things to come. Easily I might have chosen this for first place.

SARA PARRELL

2ND PLACE WINNER

Lilac Gardens

In the city of my childhood
I am dancing with Nyla Weitzmann

because it is acceptable for girls to polka
with girls under the smoky lights

of Lilac Gardens, Highway 14's dance hall
west of everything I know.

Here our older sisters and their friends host
wedding dances and blue-ink music writes its vow

into the night. Nyla and I two-step and waltz
as good as the bridesmaids, our damp arms drape

each other's matching shifts of puckered
pink seersucker and we are hot, so hot

we consider burning down the house, shouting
to the mop-haired boys slouched against

the cinder blocks *Jump up and catch me!*, hustling
out the side door and into the vast tracts of grain.

This is where I lose her—she romps away
with the tall one into the rustling husks

while I backpedal into the dark womb just in time
to see the bride lift her dress for man after man

to slip his dollar into her garter for a so-wet kiss.

by Sara Parrell

Austerity

here in this sundog wash of light on slate
the young novice sweeps her cell and polishes
window glass as if it were her newborn's face
she hears what others listen for after the storm
thanks Him for the oaks' lost limbs, space
that allows a glimpse of the lip-red barns
hills that know how much she can bear
each month she learns to let go
one more familiar object she carried—
a porcelain rouge box her grandmother emptied
in their farmhouse on the banks of the Bad Axe
her sister's wallet-size graduation photo stamped
Burns Studio and on its back the handwriting lolls
and blinks *P.S. Take it easy on those boys!* turquoise
bracelets she bargained with penny rolls
from the Indian Museum in the Dells and at last
she unravels the green wool row by row
her dead mother's stitches loosen, unfasten
as easily as dried sand from toes, shawl become wound
ball of yarn she lays in the Reverend Mother's palm—o
blessed sphere of petition
o love, that distant sound

by Sara Parrell

Sara Parrell is a Madison poet and children's nurse. Her work was published previously in the *Wisconsin Academy Review, RoundRiver Current*, and other journals as well as the anthology *Lake Wingra Morning*. She has been an invited reader at local and regional venues, is a member of Lake Effect poets (a writing and performance group), and has led workshops on the intersection of writing, mindfulness, and healing. Growing up in the Wisconsin River Valley on a farm on the edge of a small village, she lived a variety of experiences when children were allowed to be in wild spaces on their own terms. Writing about farming and rural life is less a choice and more the case that these experiences and their related images show up in her poems out of their own necessity and desire.

THE JUDGE'S WORDS

Lead judge Bruce Taylor on "Happiness, Still"

Sentimentality probably ruins more poems for me than anything else, but of course, we have to risk it, don't we. So why have I fallen for a poem that ends—inescapably—with a bluebird of happiness? It could be its elegance, its intelligence, or even its two dashes, but no. It's how every time I read it, three commas, three caesuras, break my heart: the one in the title and the two in the last line.

KAY N. SANDERS

3RD PLACE WINNER

Happiness, Still

A new housing development flows down the hill
to the lake, only one lowly field remaining,
a reminder of the tangle of honeysuckle

where birds tucked away their secret nests,
where wild grasses concealed pathways
for small animals, and an ancient apple tree

lowered its branches for the munching
pleasure of passing deer. On this clear,
middle-of-April day, I walk the remnant

of field, startle a bird from a tuft of tall grass.
My heart leaps at the flash of blue, the flush
of rose on breast, and I see that, still

the bluebird comes

by Kay N. Sanders

Afternoon Comes to an End

I sit at the window watching
afternoon come to an end,
a curious quality to the light,
a half-light, a feeling of green,
not vibrant and growing but faded
with an underlay of yellow
as though lit from below,
the woods dark
at the edge of the yard.

I feel I am part
of a painting,
the one perhaps
from my childhood home.
How often was I drawn
into its spell, absorbed
by the cottage
and its other-world light,
the boy walking a path

edged with woods,
past a pond yellowed
with the late sun's luster.
He goes, I think, for the cows,
to bring them home
before day is done.
The light, though fading,
nonetheless fades no further,
but is caught and held,

a light not extinguished
by the coming dark.

by Kay N. Sanders

Kay N. Sanders of Oshkosh first connected with Wisconsin sitting at her fourth-grade desk in the deep South reading *Little House in the Big Woods* and never dreaming that one day Wisconsin would become her home. She grew up hearing her mother and her maternal aunts recite poetry, sing songs, argue, tell stories, quote scripture, cuss now and then, though never allowing the children to do so. How could she not become a poet?

Her work has been published not widely but well, in issues of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' *Poets' Calendar*, *Fox Cry*, *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, local and regional church venues, the *Journal* of the international P.E.O. sisterhood, and the upcoming issue of *Free Verse*. She is a recipient of the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association Jade Rings in essay and in poetry, and she has placed twice in the runners-up category in the *Wisconsin People & Ideas* poetry contest.

She likes to write about things rural because she loves them, they call to her, speaking a language she wants to learn and to translate and in the process be translated.

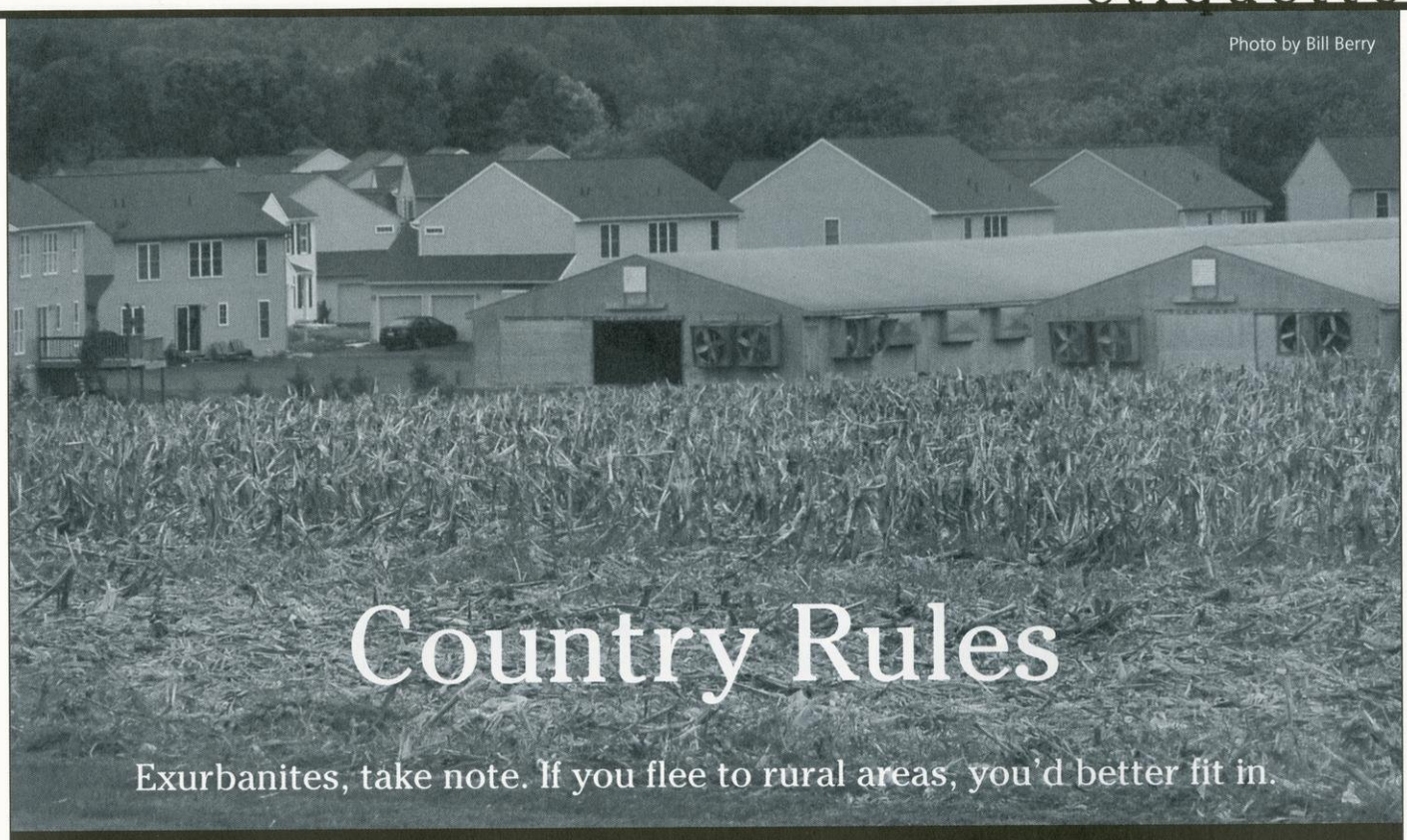


Photo by Bill Berry

Country Rules

Exurbanites, take note. If you flee to rural areas, you'd better fit in.

BY JUSTIN ISHERWOOD

When people move to the country, they have to satisfy a certain and at times stringent set of zoning ordinances. Never mind that in my opinion zoning laws are not stringent enough if those persons emigrating to rural locales are not country themselves in both comportment and demeanor.

I have, as a consequence of being here first, watched people move to the country and build their dream house, which too often is less a house than a barn. A show barn with more bathrooms than people, a master bedroom the size of a basketball court, and a hot tub bigger than a cattle trough. A standard routine soon follows: a three-stall garage and a paved driveway, all of it lighted up like a Ringling Brothers Circus. The three-stall garage is an omen, explaining why, despite the opulence and comfort of those handsome digs, the residents are rarely home. The town road is plowed and salted expressly for their comings and goings, hasty comings and goings I might add. At the town meeting they are always of the pavement party, the gravel medium no longer up to their standards.

As a consequence I have drafted and put to my town board a new set of zoning ordinances whose options and elements might better satisfy rural zoning requirements than such things as set-back and lot size. And, I should add, these items will cost the applicant less than a hot tub and yet mark them as loyal to country ways, the very sentiment they profess to seek. Despite their ignorance of the fact that "rural" is an ecology, the same as the Amazon is an ecology, full of intricacies and subtleties that if vanquished, tilt the entire enterprise toward doom. As is the way of ecologies. Hence my reasoning why the gravel road is fundamental.

The list:

Item 1. A clothesline. One each to every household. Visible from the road. The same shall on regular occasion be demonstrated as in use. I believe in the Holy Trinity of the rural place: prayers and/or poetry, hand-wrought bread, and the clothesline. Not only is the clothesline good for the environment and the electric bill, but the clothes feel better. Beyond which is the lesson that hanging your underwear in open view provides a genuine public good. Were I a psychologist, along with my shingle I would hang a clothesline, and in the course of therapy encourage patients to cross that bridge also.

Item 2. Garden. Required. Flowers don't count. A true country person ought to swear fidelity to country mores and ethics by trying a garden and growing something edible on his or her own. A fundamental truth soon emerges: food is worth more than we give it credit.

Item 3. It bothers me when the pastoral home resembles the Palace of Versailles and its lawn that at Arlington. Lawns are the mark of the tyrant. They require a lawn mower the size of a nice horse. I would not mind so much if it were a horse. Beyond this, a country yard ought to by law contain one vehicle on blocks, supposedly getting fixed. As demonstrates a can-do kind of spunk, fixing something yourself, even if you don't yet know how, but will, even-

tually. As explains why it sits there all summer. Figuring out how.

Item 4. Dogs. Required. Thirty-five pounds minimum adult weight. A real dog, not just coyote bait.

Item 5. A porch, or if you prefer the Germanic, a porche. A porch is on the front side of the country house. It is an invitation to stop by without the fuss of the written invitation. A deck on the back side of the house does not satisfy this ordinance; it does not invite.

Item 6. Back to the lawn mower—sell it. Country, real country people use rabbits and Holstein heifers, use sheep and colts, even chickens will do an admirable job to the point where you never need worry about mowing the lawn again.

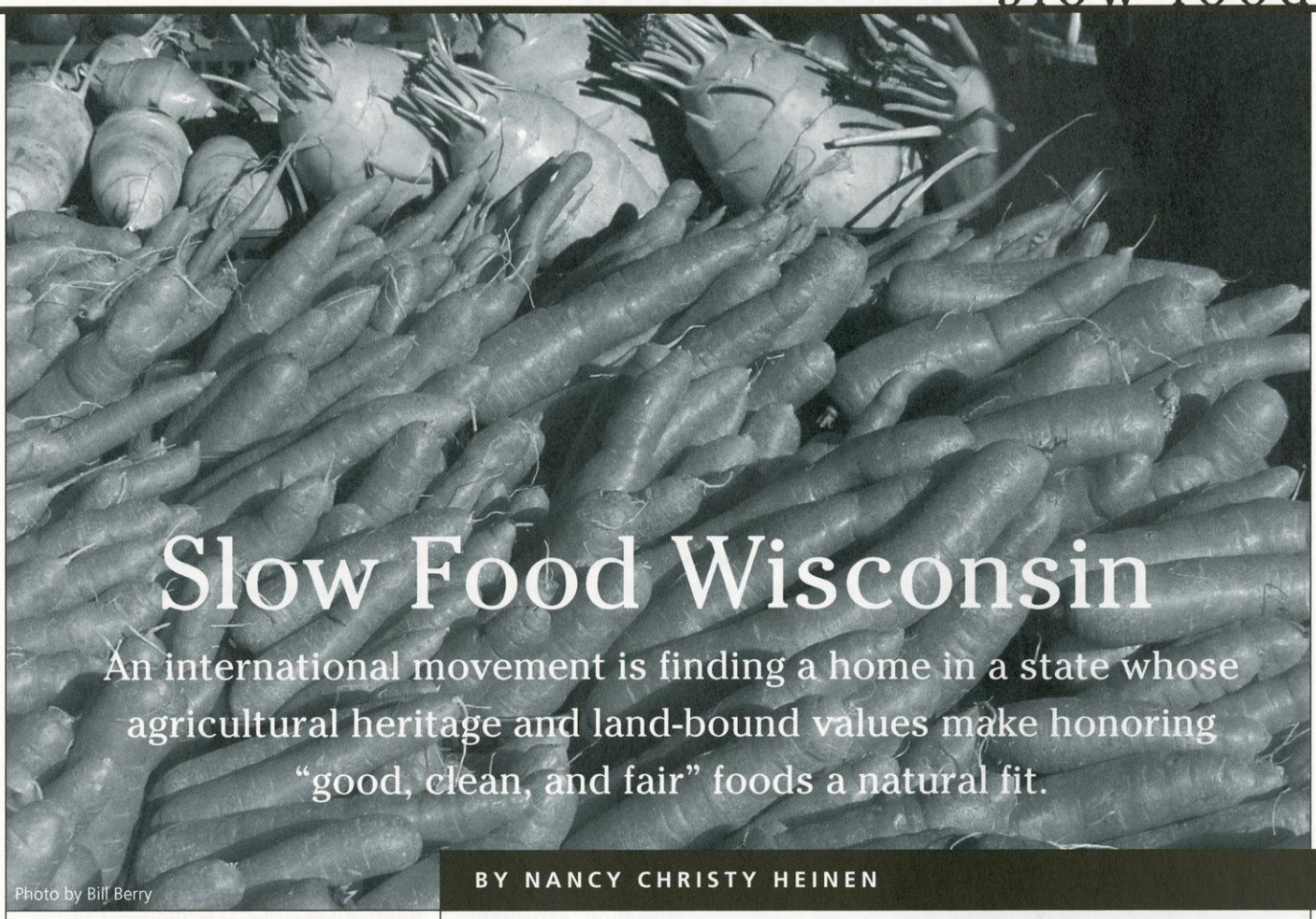
Item 7. Woodpile. You want to be country? Want to go native? Go deep cover? A woodpile visible from the road. A woodpile infers the proper use and tutoring of children. And, a woodlot is required. As a result the field lives in balance with this other civilization. Done routinely it is good for the spine and the spare tire.

Item 8. Chickens. Zoning laws do not now require chickens; this is an error. Had the founding fathers known we would become so lax and dismissive of fundamentals, they would have mentioned chickens by name in the Bill of Rights. They assumed everybody understood that the implications for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness included the chicken.

Item 9. One large mailbox mounted on a large fence post. A little mailbox means you've sold your soul to WalMart and forgotten how to mail order. The reason an area the size of Ohio is now paved over with cement is because due consideration has not been given to the mailbox. Means people aren't serious about country.

Item 10. The old Superman trick—a country house disappears. The show house is too proud to disappear, as demonstrates its incompatibility. The object lesson of being country in the first place is not the house but the scenery; it is a worthy ambition to disappear into the scenery. To blend in. Meld. Absorb. Which is not to say a country place is unsophisticated. It may not be a Frank Lloyd Wright granite countertop. It may not have a show kitchen and a show bathroom. Instead it holds on to what it means to belong. The rule, if you don't remember, is to disappear. As to night lights, smash 'em. Nothing destroys near and available Nature and its wild heart more viciously and cruelly than mercury vapor. So vital is this that I would go out on a limb and propose that if one commandment is great, it is this: Put out those damn lights. If you are that afraid, you belong somewhere else. Not in the country. But when you visit, it will still be a good place. ✹

Justin Isherwood is a farmer and writer. His books include ***The Farm West of Mars*** *and* ***Book of Plough****.*



Slow Food Wisconsin

An international movement is finding a home in a state whose agricultural heritage and land-bound values make honoring "good, clean, and fair" foods a natural fit.

Photo by Bill Berry

BY NANCY CHRISTY HEINEN

OF THE MANY ICONIC IMAGES our imaginations might draw upon for depicting ourselves as living in Wisconsin, the one with the greatest history, the broadest sweep, and the deepest connection is likely the farm. Our roots are on the farm, and from those roots spring lofty status: dairy capital and cheese-producing giant (at risk as they may now be) as well as the sense of healthy well-being found in "living off the land."

In reality, our relationship to the food we eat, the people who grow it, and the land on which it is grown has become tenuous at best. Many of us here as well as around the country have become satisfied with the bucolic images of the past and the modern version of foraging (at the local supermarket) while at the same time growing increasingly anxious over the quality of our food, the viability of our farms, the health of our land, and the pace of our lives.

Still, Wisconsin offers some of the richest farmland in the world and a diverse cultural history of food production and artisan craftsmanship. The Slow Food movement in general, and Slow Food International in particular, offer a philosophical and practical relational framework. There is little wonder we see the impact of Slow Food growing throughout Wisconsin in ways that will significantly affect our future and, perhaps, the future of Slow Food as well.

What is "slow food," you may wonder? In capital letters, Slow Food is an international organization that supports local producers, the preservation of heritage foods, biodiversity, and a sustainable food supply. It has more than 80,000 members in over 100 countries, including more than 12,000 members belonging to 140 local chapters, called "convivia," in the United States. There are currently two in Wisconsin: Slow Food Madison and Slow Food Wisconsin Southeast.

It all started in Italy, where Carlo Petrini founded Slow Food as a response to the opening of the first McDonald's in Rome's historic Piazza de Spagna in 1986. The nonprofit organization is headquartered in Bra, the city in the Piedmont region of Northwest Italy where Petrini was born. Petrini's background is in politics, and early on some questioned his motivation for abandoning the leftist politics, for which he had become known, for what was derided as "culinary elitism."

But in the last 20 years, Petrini has infused Slow Food with a passionate commitment not just to the pleasures of the table, but to sustainability in all its forms and the championing of local economies as the promise of a healthier, more just, "slow" world. In fact, what has been especially notable at the two Terra Madre Slow Food conferences—attended by 5,000 farmers, shepherds, fishermen, nomads, and citizens from 150 different countries in 2004, and an estimated 9,000 people in 2006—was the *lack* of culinary elitism.

The title Slow Food is not easy to explain, and it is actually a stumbling block for some. But it works perfectly when used by Petrini as the framework for advancing the principles of good, clean, and fair, in the context of the sustainable local community. Petrini's vision is a worldwide network of local economies, based on three principles—solidarity, support, and subsistence—and all built around food.

Because this is a global vision it must necessarily transcend not just political and language barriers, but some of the very barriers that have changed the landscape in Wisconsin agriculture: social and cultural. And what you'll find in talking to some of the most knowledgeable practitioners in Wisconsin is that Slow Food works best as a sort of organic blueprint for relationships and conversations about food, especially the pleasures of the table and issues having to do with production.

Slow Food Madison convivium leader Susan Boldt says the Madison group exists to "support artisan producers committed to sustaining the land and who develop products of excellent taste ... our Wisconsin farmers, cheesemakers, sausage makers, wine makers and brewers," as well as offering taste education classes for both community and school groups. Those goals could likely exist without an international organization supporting them.

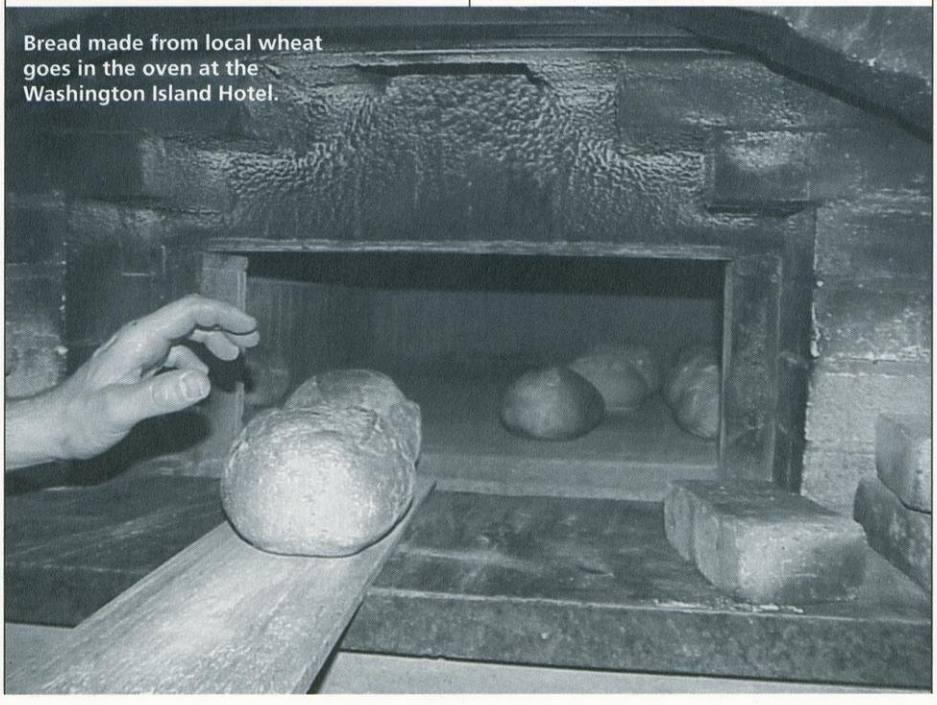
But where Slow Food appears to be most effective locally is in bringing together philosophy and pragmatism. That combination helped Jack Kaestner bring locally produced foods to his customers at the Oconomowoc Lake Club, where he is executive chef. "There's a nucleus now in Madison, and some other people are starting to do stuff," says Kaestner. "We went toward Slow Food first because we believe in the ideals, and it gives you an international platform to work from."

That platform was instrumental in Kaestner winning the support of his club's manager to make an investment in those Slow Food ideals. "He saw the response of our members to the local food and then he actually went to the statewide organization of club managers and asked for some money to print a directory and hold some farmer/chef meetings."

The group gave a total of $4,000 to do that. "He saw the strong response from members, and sometimes it comes from members you'd not expect at all, and for different reasons," Kaestner explains. "For some, it's about their kids' health. For others, it's about their own health."

And Kaestner was able to use the context of the size of Slow Food's membership both nationally and internationally when he thanked the state club managers' organization for their contribution—"So that they didn't think this is just some money so Jack and [wife] Deb could do a project."

The money was used for an event, the Farmer-Chef Connection, which Kaestner describes as "just a venue for getting farmers and chefs together and talking about some of the obstacles to working together and shortening that learning curve."



Bread made from local wheat goes in the oven at the Washington Island Hotel.

Last year a little over 100 people showed up, including three chefs and three farmers. "We'd been doing it for more than six years, and this time we had that many[people], including students from a couple of local culinary schools and one school's whole purchasing class," says Kaestner. "One of the chefs said it's the best thing he'd been to in 15 years."

Rather than the usual trade show, the Farmer-Chef Connection was an opportunity to actually talk to the producer. "That gives a whole different meaning to what they're doing," says Kaestner. "I think that's kind of the beauty of Slow Food, that you can look at your region, and maybe look at some region-specific issues that impact the bigger issue."

That regional vision was also important to Washington Island Hotel executive chef Leah Caplan's interest in the movement. That, and an emotion she clearly shared with Petrini toward the Rome McDonald's.

"I think my attraction to Slow Food is the same reason it was founded, just sort of a general disgust, for lack of a better word," says Caplan. "Just gathering like-minded people on food and social issues, social food issues, really opened my eyes. Not being a native Wisconsinite, through my involvement in Slow Food and the Ark it really did open my eyes to Wisconsin and to some really great foods and traditions in Wisconsin."

The "Ark of Taste" is a Slow Food offshoot that "aims to rediscover, catalog, describe, and publicize forgotten flavors." Ark products range from the Italian Valchiavenna goat to the American Navajo-Churro sheep and a unique variety of Greek fava bean grown only on the island of Santorini. All are endangered products that have real economic viability and commercial potential.

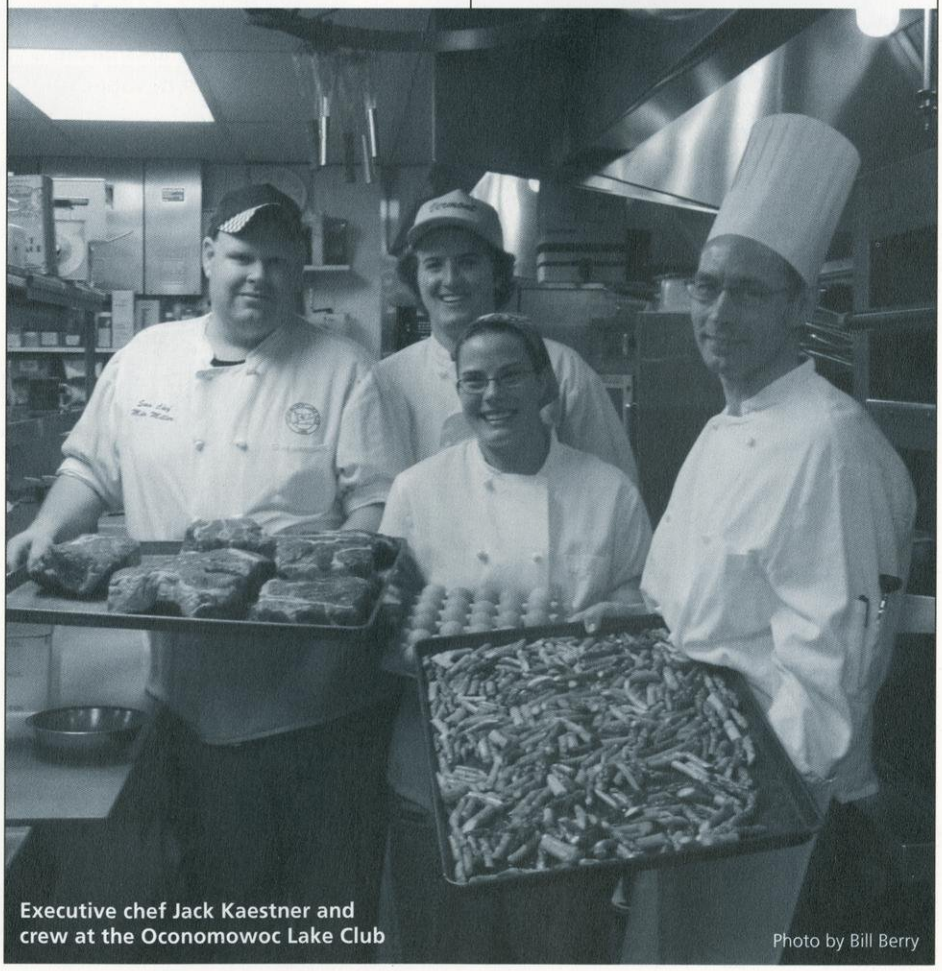
Many of these products are being supported by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity as part of something called the Presidia. According to the Foundation, the objective of the Presidia is to "protect small-scale producers and ... safeguard quality artisanal products" by ensuring "a future for food communities by organizing producers, searching out new economic outlets, and promoting and enhancing the profiles of tastes and regions."

One of those projects is the promotion of American raw milk cheeses. Founding members come from nine states, including Wisconsin. At the invitation of Slow Food, delegates to the 2006 Terra Madre included Mike and Carol Gingrich of Uplands Cheese Company in Dodgeville, Tony Hook from Hook's Cheese Company in Mineral Point, Will Lehner of Bleu Mont Dairy in Blue Mounds, and Anne Topham of Fantome Farm in Ridgeway.

With the exception of Slow Food Madison's unique "twinning" relationship with Sister City Slow Food chapters in Italy and Germany, they are perhaps the closest link right now between Wisconsin and the Slow Food organization. Another important link: late last fall, Madison restaurateur Tami Lax (of Harvest, on the Capitol Square) hosted a two-day meeting of Slow Food USA board members evaluating products for inclusion in the 2007 version of the Presidia.

And there are certainly other Wisconsin products worthy of consideration. Terra Madre delegate Nathan Berg, the executive chef at Native Bay Restaurant and Lounge in Chippewa Falls, featured wild rice grown by the Ojibwe tribe of Northwestern Wisconsin in a meal he helped prepare at a Madison Sister City event in Mantova, Italy. There he spoke of the quality of the product and the risk that it and the Ojibwe people face as researchers work to produce a modified version of the grain.

Berg, like Kaestner, is furthering the philosophy of Slow Food by integrating local products into menus where they have traditionally not been found—at a country club, for example, or in this case, a resort. "He's doing what needs to be done in the Chippewa Falls area, and it really is good," says Madison chapter president Susan Boldt. "And we have a lot of people around the state who are



Executive chef Jack Kaestner and crew at the Oconomowoc Lake Club

Photo by Bill Berry

doing what needs to be done. But they're not necessarily members of Slow Food."

In fact, the promise of Slow Food in Wisconsin may not be in the number of members, or convivia, or chefs or farmers who associate with Slow Food, but rather the many like-minded people who already were integrating the principles of good, clean, and fair into their food production or preparation before Slow Food identified them, or who are now practicing the principles without the need for or interest in being organizationally connected to Slow Food.

From fish and cherries in Door County and Leah Caplan's wheat on Washington Island, to the organic dairy farms of the Southwestern Uplands, and from the farmers' markets that dot rural roads throughout the state to those in Madison and West Bend with expansive offerings of Wisconsin-grown and organic produce, Wisconsinites can find ample evidence of the Slow Food farm-to-table relationship.

But there is also abundant evidence that the influence of Slow Food, as a formal movement, is growing in Wisconsin as well. Slow Food Wisconsin Southeast last year offered outdoor cooking classes by board member David Swanson and food preservation classes at the Urban Ecology Center led by another Slow Food member, Annie Wegner, as well as producing the 2006 Farm Fresh Atlas of Southeast Wisconsin.

Slow Food Madison, in addition to organizing the Wisconsin delegation's trip to Terra Madre, sponsored the Slow Food Garden project at Middleton High School, the Sister City Partnership Seed-to-Supper Demonstration Garden at the UW–Madison West Research Garden, and the Madison Urban Kitchen Garden project.

All are examples of Slow Food's commitment to building local economies. It should be noted that the relationships needed to realize the promise of Slow Food include government and the business side of the food economy. Petrini defines Slow Food as good, clean, and fair. If good is primarily the work of chefs, whether in restaurants or the home, clean and fair require additional partners. Both state and local governments must be involved; environmental and agricultural regulations and guidelines need to be in place if food is to be clean. And Wisconsin governments and businesses must work together to ensure the economic sustainability of food, including a sustainable workforce if food is to be fair.

It's a broad reach, but it is one we have to make if we are to become Slow Food Wisconsin. One of the most important conversations we are having in every corner of this state regards the use of our land. Losing farmland is not something Slow Food talks about a lot. Here, Wisconsin is very much ahead of the game. Or behind. We are losing thousands of acres of farmland and hundreds of farms, and in many cases the antidote is simply patronizing local farms.

Or growing wheat on it again, as Leah Caplan of the Washington Island Hotel is doing on the island. And she's not doing it because it's the essence of Slow Food. "I don't feel like I need the framework anymore," she says. "I feel like I'm really doing something, and not everybody is in a position to do something on this scale. Some people are practitioners in small ways, and for them it's probably more important to gather regularly and share in small ways."

Small ways that make the connection between Slow Food and what we see around us in Wisconsin every day. "Slow Food is a touchstone for us," says Caplan, "and it is also a touchstone for other people to really understand or relate to what we're doing. If the people living on the island don't quite get it, thinking to themselves, 'You're not farmers,' Slow Food helps them with a context they get."

Or good, clean, and fair, in a state where those words have meaning and history. ✹

Tami Lax, owner of the restaurant Harvest on the Capitol Square, last fall hosted a national tasting of foods to be included in the Presidia.

Photo by Zane Williams

Nancy Christy Heinen owns Meaningful People, Places & Foods, offering creative strategies for sustainable employment, work culture, artisan foods, and social entrepreneurship.

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Late Season Storm **(2002), David Lenz. Watercolor on paper, 5¼" x 7¼" Courtesy of Steve and Jane Cernof**

An exhibition called "Wisconsin's People on the Land" provides a visual arts perspective on the future of farming and rural life in our state, with comment by humanities scholars. Story on page 31.

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