



## Bread and Culture

by Paul Gruchow

Freshly written as the first essay on the cover of *Community Connections*, fall 1992.

**I**N A SENSE, the world in which I grew up caved in after the Second World War. The post-war years were boom times in farming country; we had Europe to feed as well as ourselves; we had, for the first time, both the machinery and the chemicals to accelerate exponentially the pace of production in the countryside; and the gospel of “scientific” farming

had been planted for long enough to have taken root. Farmers had learned to let go of their conservative land-wisdom and to follow the more adventurous, not to say reckless, advice of their bankers—debt being the first article in the new faith—and of the University extension agents, whose lack of practical experience in farming was seen not as a handicap but as a recommendation: they had, after all, risen above the menial, the back-breaking, the filthy labor of farming as it was ever more fervently described. They wore white shirts and ties and were never in danger of soiling them.

The bubble of the late 1940s quickly burst; by the Eisenhower years, we were suffocating in surplus grain, prices had collapsed, the government was bribing farmers not to grow crops, and farmers were dumping milk to protest their plight and turning upon each other. Some shots were fired. These were people who had defeated the Great Depression and survived the battlefields of Europe and Asia, but many of them would not endure industrial farming. In the 1950s, some ten million farm people left the land, broken by what is still sometimes despicably hailed as the great triumph of modern agriculture.

My father managed, despite the odds, to hang on, largely, I think, because he was by nature a contrarian. He kept his farm small, practiced diversity, eschewed machines and chemicals when the labor of his own hands

was a suitable alternative, avoided debt. He was, by today’s standards, when the environmental and social costs of industrial farming have become obvious, a virtuous farmer: careful of his land, as respectful of its wild edges as of its tilled acres, conservative in the use of expendable resources, attentive to the requirements of scale, and motivated by the already novel conviction that farming was primarily a moral rather than an economic endeavor, that its purpose was not chiefly to accumulate capital but to feed the hungry.

We were poor, and we worked hard, although not so hard, in fact, as our more modern neighbors. We toiled when the sun was up, rested when it was not, and took Sundays off, as our religion required, while all around us at planting and harvest times, the machines rumbled late into the night, and Sundays were on their way to becoming ordinary days in the relentless turning of the weeks. As elsewhere in society, labor saving machines did not so much offer freedom from drudgery as enslavement to creditors.

Because we raised our own food, it was always in adequate supply; because our fuel was raised on our own land, we were always warm and dry; because we had acquired little, we had little to lose. We experienced the joys and befell the sorrows that are the lot of all humanity. Our lives were not idyllic—far from it—but they were not mean

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# the MINNESOTA PROJECT

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## Dear Readers...

BY THE TIME I GREW UP, Wonder Bread was already building bodies twelve ways, not seven. But like Paul Gruchow's mother (see cover essay), my mother made our bread—white bread, influenced as even she was by the culture of the day. Later, her recipe evolved into a honey-wheat bread that enhanced our family's diet for a few more decades.

We were smart enough to like it, and in that way, I suppose, we were living inside the turning of the culture away from industrialized everything and back toward the re-capturing of qualities not easily given up.

We've chosen to re-print Paul's premiere essay here as a tribute to over 15 years of *Community Connections*, as a tribute to Paul who died in 2004, and to close a loop as I end my editorship of this fine journal/newsletter. I have sought out cover pieces and poetry for sixty-some issues, and am now turning my writing and editing work a little northward as I take on the staff leadership of the Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation. (Ask me later about the retreat and study center called "Mallard Island" on Rainy Lake.)

Paul's writing reflects a certain self-righteousness of the early sustainable agriculture movement. He "calls it," in his first paragraphs, and in 1992 the Minnesota Project raised up that courageous voice of his as a turning-point essay in the life of our own organization.

It's fun to reflect on that commitment as we look at our Heartland Food Network today. Heartland Food Network (alongside many local foods groups) is bringing the "soul" back into our food system—putting the culture back into the bread, and once again valuing the labor and soil and "terroire" that makes food unique to a region and good for our bodies. Chef by chef, restaurant by restaurant, eater by eater, this work continues. I challenge its leaders to stay bold on the issues and to remember our roots.

As for me? For many many years I looked forward to writing "Dear Readers" as I might plan a Christmas letter to friends. That will stop now, but I'm not going far. I'm in the community, and you can continue to find me electronically at [beth@bethwaterhouse.com](mailto:beth@bethwaterhouse.com) or now at [www.eober.org](http://www.eober.org), or in my home office. I'll be shepherding folks on and off an island most of the summer of 2008 and hopefully a few summers beyond that, and in the Canadian shield ecosystem my writing stays deeply connected to these issues—the junction of heart and earth, the place where words and soul and land and water meet. That the venue for this spirit to words to spirit mission of mine has taken a northerly turn is just one luck of my life. Please stay in touch, and bring me into your sphere of influence when the light is right.

— Beth E. Waterhouse,  
Editor, *Community Connections*,  
since 1992  
(952) 401-0591



In January, Beth Waterhouse became the Executive Director of the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation, "dedicated to the preservation of Ober's north woods legacy as a source of inspiration, renewal, and connection to the natural world." The Foundation maintains Mallard Island in Rainy Lake from mid-May to early September each year. Mallard is offered one week at a time to those who come with an open heart and mind to absorb its spirit and to use its unique resources to think, create, imagine, reflect and find respite.

IT IS SUCH A PLEASURE to be the new executive director of the Minnesota Project. Even though this is the end of an era for *Community Connections* in one way, in the upcoming months, we will be looking deeper into our



mission and vision statements, and we will be deciding how to best communicate with you—including what avenues to use. Never fear, we will stay connected.

Since I am still in the process of learning about everything, I wanted to reflect on nonprofits in general and the Minnesota Project in particular. If the Minnesota Project were a plant, we would be the listed in the nonprofit species. Nonprofits hold a special place in our culture. We might be considered the conscience of society. We provide services that are needed but not available through the normal commercial channels, primarily because they are not economically viable. We work with government but have the ability to take the risks that government entities either cannot or choose not to take. For foundations and individuals who would like to provide public

services, we provide the footwork to get things done. Nonprofits, in general, play a critical role providing services and programs for the rest of society.

The roots of the Minnesota Project run deep and reach in many directions.

I am still digging down to be able to fully appreciate all that we have done and the many people who have passed through our organization's root system. As I try to

put names to faces I continue to hear, "He used to work for The Minnesota Project," or "She was an intern here several years ago." The roots are not only what hold the plant in place, but they provide the nutrients from the rich soil to sustain life. Thank you—to the people who planted, nourished and enabled The Minnesota Project to thrive. The list is long, the contributions unique, but all played a vital role in achieving who we are today.

The Minnesota Project that is currently in bloom produces much fruit—fruit from our agriculture efforts and our clean energy and local foods programs. We have a history of producing different fruit as the needs change and the cultural cross-pollination pushes our creativity to find new answers and fill

new gaps. With the real and growing threat of global warming, for instance, the Minnesota Project is proud to be playing a part in providing solutions. The Board of Directors is busy sewing seeds, looking for a few new board members and revisiting our mission, vision and core values. The staff, while tending to their normal busy schedules, are also scouting for new funding and new programs. We are like the perpetual spring of new life pushing forth.

For any plant to survive, rain and sun are essential. Our donors and volunteers are the rain and sun for us. Our overall health and our continued survival depend on these elements. Thank you for being our sun and our rain. And we look to you for continued sustenance.

As I consider the whole ecosystem, I'm excited to be playing the part of the new gardener. Like the new set of eyes that first smells the scent and sees the beauty, like the one responsible for the right amount of fertilizer, or even like the seeds themselves deciding to

*"...like the seeds themselves deciding to germinate, reaching up toward the sun to maximize their potential."*

germinate, reaching up toward the sun to maximize their potential, I appreciate that I am a part of a whole system. We invite you to not only watch us grow, but become more involved, and to play your own unique roles. Together, we are enabling something beautiful to bloom. ☘

Rebecca Baumann  
– Executive Director

# Midwest Agriculture is Energized

by Jocie Iszler, Director, Midwest Ag-Energy Network

**I**F SCIENTISTS ARE SUCCESSFUL, and if they receive adequate funding, America could someday derive as much as one quarter of its transportation fuels from bio-mass such as energy crops, crop residues, leaves, wood, and grasses. But, as was pointed out by speakers at the recent Midwest Ag Energy Summit in Madison, Wisconsin, both are very big “ifs.”

Dr. Bruce Dale, veteran researcher at Michigan State, started his work in the early 1970s when the federal government first funded research on cellulosic biofuels production. Dale recalled the disappointment when federal funds dried up as oil prices returned to 1960s levels.



The rural Midwest sits on half of the nation’s biomass from its croplands, pasturelands and forests. Could we be the future energy producer that powers the heavily populated, energy hungry coastal areas of the United States? Or as Randy Udall, keynote speaker, posed: “Should the Midwest just worry about itself and set its sights on being 100% energy self-sufficient first before sending its energy to the eastern and western coasts?”

What would the Midwest rural economy look like if the \$1 billion a day now spent on imported petroleum started flowing here? Those were the questions

posed to a February gathering of more than 140 agriculture, energy and rural development stakeholders who met in Madison to look at the Midwest—and America’s—“bioenergy” future.

If done right, the bio-energy boom could fundamentally alter the economy of the Midwest. To do this “right,” however, we need to be clear about our desired outcomes. Featured speaker, David Morris of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, drew a distinction between change, which is inevitable, and progress, which can be problematic. Progress in renewable energy is often measured in gallons of biofuels produced from agricultural lands. However, many would argue that there is a qualitative difference between gal-

lons of biofuels produced in 100 million gallon per year plants owned by absentee owners and gallons of biofuels produced in small, distributive systems owned

by local residents. As Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Secretary Rod Nilsestuen told the crowd, We don’t want to do all this “just to create a footprint for Exxon.”

Other questions loom just as large. What amount of biomass can we safely remove from the land? How can we overcome the logistical hurdles of handling bulky biomass? How will cellulosic biomass change the local ownership landscape for producers? Bruce Dale offered intriguing insights on these issues with his innovative

research on the Regional Biomass Pre-processing Center (RBPC) model. Dale envisions RBPCs encircling a centralized cellulosic biofuels plant. Farmers would have the option of investing in the RBPC and/or the central biofuels plant. The RBPC addresses logistical concerns related to biomass handling plus provides the diversification of a biorefinery. According to Dale, “It is time for agriculture to assert itself and insist that the \$1 billion per day that we now send abroad for imported oil be spent on biofuel production on our own lands.”

These aren’t easy questions. Nor are there easy answers. If we’ve learned one thing in the past few years, it is that world markets set price and allocate supply, and it is up to us to do the planning by improving energy efficiency and developing new energy sources while also maintaining the integrity of our water, land and habitat.

We don’t know what our “bioenergy” future will look like, but we do know that change is upon us. For a century, we’ve relied on fossil fuels. As fossil fuels diminish in supply, increase in price and load the atmosphere with carbon, we need solutions. The Midwest lies in the heart of those solutions.

The Midwest Ag Energy Network Summit was created to ask the tough questions—and start us thinking about the right answers. Stimulating speakers and an engaged crowd of participants yielded lively, animated discussion during networking breaks, leading to the development of an on-line forum to carry the momentum through continued discussion. If you’d like to get energized by participating in the upcoming forum or want to access the full Madison Summit presentations, go to [www.midwestagenergy.net](http://www.midwestagenergy.net). ☘

*Jocie Iszler is director of the Midwest Ag Energy Network and Ag Energy Policy Specialist for the Minnesota Project. She lives in Fargo ND.*

## Wealth in Winter

by Elyse Gordon – Heartland Food Network Intern

**A**T THE WRITING OF THIS ARTICLE, the temperature outside remains below zero, windchill advisories sweep through the plains, and a foot of snow covers our soil. How on earth could anything grow here? While local foods awareness gains strength, a common concern is whether one can truly eat locally in the winter.

To consume local ingredients in winter, we have to broaden how we envision local foods. Fruits and vegetables are not the only thing produced on Minnesota farms; meat and dairy are two of Minnesota's most important agricultural product lines. Available throughout the year, these products are found at your local dining establishment, coop, winter CSA and more. In fact, if you visit a farmers' market this time of year, you're likely to find many livestock and dairy farmers braving the windchill.

However, if you need more than meat and dairy during these winter months, don't despair! There are plenty of root cellar vegetables, harvested in late autumn, ready for you even in the depths of winter. Root vegetables such as onions, carrots, radishes, beets, potatoes, winter squash, garlic and apples can all be stored to last through the winter, and if these earthy fruits and vegetables still don't satisfy your palate, hothouse greens and hydroponics are also available. These greens provide a fresh reminder of the bounty of food in the upcoming spring months.

Local winter eating can be recommended and praised, but when it comes right down to it, can it actually be done? Tejas Restaurant in Edina shows that local restaurants can succeed in this improbable winter challenge.

Tejas, a vibrant Southwestern-inspired restaurant in Edina, has long prized local ingredients. Executive Chef Jorge Guzman is passionate about incorporating local ingredients into their menu. In the wintertime, he explains, it is certainly more difficult to get local products for their menu; however, with potatoes, other root crops, meat and dairy, there is enough variety for their clientele. Guzman has made a commitment to sourcing their dairy and meat from local producers throughout the year. In fact, 95% of their meat comes from places like St. Michael, Minnesota, with the other 5% hailing from Iowa. Guzman admits that in winter about 80% of their food actually comes from local sources, but in the summer, that number climbs to approximately 95%!

At the center of the local food movement, of course, is the appreciation for good, healthy, food grown within our home communities. Finding it takes just a little extra connecting. The Heartland Food Network not only connects people to local products, but also connects communities together. With our new member-driven database, [www.homegrownheartlandmarketplace.org](http://www.homegrownheartlandmarketplace.org), members can see what products are available now from local producers to find and increase the local ingredients used. From our general website, [www.heartlandfoodnetwork.org](http://www.heartlandfoodnetwork.org), you can find member chefs and distributors that have made a commitment to using local ingredients and products. Together, we are working to strengthen our communities, to live healthier lives and have a cleaner environment through promoting local and seasonal foods. Join us in this effort even in the winter! 🍌

## Tejas Restaurant Avocado Salsa

EXECUTIVE CHEF JORGE GUZMAN

COMBINE:

10 tomatillos

1 jalapeno pepper

Half of a red onion

Toss in oil and grill/roast until the mixture gets charred, soft and blistered.

Throw into food processor with 4 cloves of roasted garlic.

Blend till smooth. Then add:

two pureed avocados – and – one half cup of chopped cilantro

Add salt and lime juice to taste, and fold one finely diced avocado into the pureed mixture

*Tejas Restaurant is located at 50th and France in Edina, Minnesota, (952) 926-0800. To find more information about Tejas or our many other Heartland Food Network members who have made a commitment to local food and their local communities, visit [www.heartlandfoodnetwork.org](http://www.heartlandfoodnetwork.org) or call 651-645-6159, x9.*



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## BREAD AND CULTURE *from p. 1*

or oppressive either, in the way the peddlers of industrialism like to imagine.

The only acute pain that I can recall suffering as a result of our poverty was the intense humiliation I felt when I discovered, as an adolescent, that most people lived in another way, and that there was something shameful, so far as others were concerned, about the way we lived. I felt a kind of loneliness at not being able to invite my friends to our house, which I had thought cozy and warm until I was made to see that it was dirty and tawdry by more universal standards. I particularly did not want my friends to know that we had no plumbing; I had learned enough of the culture to know that the outhouse had become a symbol not only of indigence, but of indolence and depravity—the next thing to sleeping in gutters.

Bread was the issue over which we children voiced our new-found shame.

Ours was home-baked, using wheat raised and ground on the farm, leavened with home-cultured yeast, and sweetened with honey made by the bees we kept at the bottom of our garden. It was fabulous bread; almost every year it won my mother a purple ribbon at the Chippewa County Fair, and the slicing of the first loaf in the new batch, still steaming, its sweet, nutty aroma filling the kitchen, was one of the sacred rituals of our household.

But my sisters and I, driven by the collapse of rural culture out of our local school and into the consolidated town school, had tasted the allure of the new world. We had acquired the preference of the age for anything manufactured over anything homemade. We suddenly coveted boughten bread, made from the sort of flour that had been so denuded of its wheat-ness that its only nutrients came from its artificial additives. We were no longer content to eat hick bread. “Wonder Bread builds strong

bodies seven ways,” we said, proud of our modern familiarity with advertising slogans. We yammered and complained, I am now humiliated to confess, until Mother finally gave up baking bread, and we began to eat, like modern folk, a factory substitute.

The real poverty that we then experienced, but did not recognize, characterizes the impoverishment that befell every aspect of rural culture with the industrialization of farming. It was not only our palates that suffered, not only our bodies that were deprived of wholesome bread, but also our souls, which depended as we had not anticipated upon the sanctity of the labors that brought bread to our table. We had lost all the ceremony and artfulness that had once attended the eating of bread: the planting and tilling, the harvesting and winnowing, the grinding and making, the miracle of its rising, the mystery of

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## Interlude

by Loni Kemp

I RELUCTANTLY AGREED to get a root canal. Although my tooth only felt “a little odd,” the experts said that low-grade inflammation was bound to flare up some day into a raging toothache, undoubtedly at the least convenient time like when I was traveling. Thus I submitted to the forced march into the procedure, and I’ll reassure you that I did survive it. Even the first night was tolerable. Then infection set in and gradually my jaw ached, my face swelled, and my brain grew foggy.

Thus began my week-long enforced interlude. Stronger painkillers and antibiotics left me in a slow mode of waiting and suffering. I lay around, watching Netflix movies and counting the hours until my next pills. Surviving on yogurt and oatmeal, I made half-hearted stabs at checking email and responding to a few other commitments, but mostly I drifted in a haze of existence.

The snow fell heavily all one day, leaving a foot of fresh beauty on top of as much snow accumulation as I can recall in our twenty five years here on the hill. Beautiful—exquisite really—but in mid-February it was also wearing.

*“...just be in the moment.... pause from constantly responding to life’s urgent demands...”*

I felt so passive that it took all day to work up the motivation to build a fire or fill the bird feeder. One feeble attempt to push snow off the walk led to worse pain.

I did manage to prepare my husband a nice little Valentines’ Day dinner, but by the time I sat down with him at the table, I felt so woozy that I left to go lie down. The next day, another blizzard and another half foot of snow arrived. This time, everyone in the region was forced to stay home and wait it out, just like me.

I picked up our book club’s current selection: *Out Stealing Horses* by Per Peterson, and was struck with this reflection by the main character, an older man who has just retired to a cabin in the woods of Norway:

“Time is important to me now. Not that it should pass quickly or slowly, but be only time, be something I live inside and fill with physical things and activities that I can divide it up by, so that it grows distinct to me and does not vanish when I am not looking.”

This is one value, then, of a root canal gone awry or a couple fierce winter storms. They force us to do what we often yearn for but find so elusive—to just be in the moment. To pause from constantly responding to life’s urgent demands: the endless torrent of email, schedules, tasks, and the constant feeling that if I stop I’ll miss something important. Instead, I can look back now that I feel better, and I realize there was a gift there in that week of doing-almost-nothing.

Life is more distinct when we live it slowly. 🍄

## BREAD AND CULTURE

from p. 6

the transforming fire, the sacrament of the first loaf, in which every member of the family had some vital role. It was a critical element in the purpose of our lives and one of the ways by which we were literally joined to our land.

The Latin word from which our own word “culture” derives had several meanings: to inhabit, to till, to worship. These are, in fact, although we have forgotten it, intimately related actions. To inhabit a place means, if one is attentive to the idea from which it comes, not simply to occupy it or merely to own it, but to dwell within it, to have joined oneself in some organic way to it. It is the place to which one’s heart as much as one’s body is attached, and the word “till” derives from an Old English word meaning to strive after, to get. And the word “worship” is a contraction: it was originally “worthship,” the homage one paid to whatever one valued. So the idea of culture encompasses not only the arts and inventions of a people but also the place within which they dwell and all that they strive after and everything that they find worthy.

When we gave up the baking of bread in our household, we abandoned more than a habit of living. In a subtle but very real way, we turned our backs upon our culture, and to that extent our lives became less worshipful. The wholesome mystery of bread, the sacrament of it, we had learned, was never in the ingredients but in the laborers that transfigured them into bread. 🍄

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Paul Gruchow was raised on a farm near Montevideo, Minnesota. Find his courage and spirit in books such as: Journal of a Prairie Year, The Necessity of Empty Places, or the book that features this original essay: Grassroots, a Universe of Home.*

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## CONNECTIONS

Dew lies heavy on the grass this morning, and it takes me back...  
to Bird's Lane, walking from Granny's house to school,  
Spirit captured in spider webs stretched here and there  
spangled among tall grasses, weeds, anything on the banks along the lane.

And I become the web, feeling dewdrops as they slide, gather,  
run down and seep into the earth.

I want to go with them, to know of primordial times,  
when a drop of water might hold keys to the secret of all that is to come.

But the spider joins the web to a vine of ivy climbing an old oak tree,  
I become the ivy, twining and reaching among the knobby branches  
seeking with tendrils to listen to sap rising from roots ranging wide.

I hear murmurs of men in robes, joining in groves of oak,  
praying their mystery prayers to beneficent gods who blessed the earth,  
or to cruel gods who demanded evil gifts.

But I am the ivy, reaching the top of the oak now visited by a large bird,  
iridescent black. And as it rises again to the sky,  
I become a feather in its beating wing, to be carried over growing grain,  
Lamb-strewn meadows, spawning ponds,  
To rest on the straw-thatched roof of a stone-built cottage.

The bird preens. The feather falls, to sail on currents of air through centuries,  
to rest upon a narrow path beside rose gardens,  
where walks a man in a wide ruffled collar,  
who smiles and picks up the feather to use as a makeshift quill.

In the cottage, he continues upon the page,  
pouring the fire from within him.  
And I long to become the poem,  
that tells forever the sweet sharing of spirit,  
Captured in dewdrops. On a web. In spring.

— Mary S. McConnell

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