Organic Farming Conference
Mt. Hope, Ohio
November 11, 2016
Welcome to the 2nd Annual Organic Farming Conference

Mt Hope, Ohio on November 11, 2016

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Schedule of Events:

8:00 AM – Registration

8:30 – Welcome and directions for the day (Mike Kline)

8:40 – Integrity, Ethics, and Purity of Purpose in Organics (David Kline)

9:00 – Cover Crops from Dairy to the Garden (Samuel Fisher)

9:30 – The Responsibility of Producing Healthy and Organic Food (Phil Nabors)

10:00 – Break/Vendor Show

10:30 – Breakout Sessions:

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11:45 – 1:00 Lunch/Vendor Show

1:00 PM – Using Resilience and Sustainability Concepts to Build Organic Farms (Fred Kirschenmann)

1:40 PM – Discussion and Response to Fred’s Observations, by Fred Kirschenmann, Phil Nabors and Jim Wedeburg

2:10 PM – Vendor Show – Vendor Demos

2:30 PM – Organic Farmers Panel: Samuel Fisher, John Miller, Jr., Pete Lehman, and Shane Hartzler

3:30 PM – Adjourn
Speaker Profiles:

Fred Kirschenmann: A longtime national and international leader in sustainable agriculture, he shares an appointment as Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center and as President of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, New York. He also continues to manage his family’s 1,800-acre certified organic farm in south central North Dakota.

He is a professor in the ISU Department of Religion and Philosophy and holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Chicago. He has held numerous appointments, including the USDA’s National Organic Standards Board and the National Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production operated by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and funded by Pew Charitable Trusts.

In April 2010, the University Press of Kentucky published a book of Kirschenmann’s essays, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*, that trace the evolution of his ecological and farming philosophy over the past 30 years.

He converted his family’s farm in North Dakota to a certified organic operation in 1976. He developed a diverse crop rotation that has enabled him to farm productively without synthetic inputs (fertilizers or pesticides) while simultaneously improving the health of the soil.

Kirschenmann’s farm has been featured in numerous publications including *National Geographic, Business Week, Audubon, the LA Times and Gourmet* magazine. In 1995 it was profiled in an award-winning video, *My Father’s Garden* by Miranda Smith Productions, and is still widely used as a teaching tool. Kirschenmann also has been advisor for several documentaries including American Meat and Symphony of the Soil.

Kirschenmann served as the Leopold Center’s second director from July 2000 to November 2005 and has been recognized widely for his work. In 2014 he received the One World Award for Lifetime Achievement. He also was one of the first 10 recipients of the James F. Beard Foundation Leadership awards in 2011 and received the 2012 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Jim Wedeberg: Jim and his wife Julie, farm in southwestern Wisconsin along with their sons, John and Jake. Jim was farming organically in the early eighties and was instrumental in the early development of organic dairying. In 1988 he, along with seven other farmers founded CROPP Co-operative, the parent company of Organic Valley which now has close to two thousand member-owner farms. Jim still lives and works on the family farm, which is now in partnership with his sons.

David Kline: A semi-retired organic farmer, David and his wife Elsie, have published Farming Magazine since 2001.

Samuel Fisher: Samuel is organic dairy farmer from Rockville, Indiana.

Phil & Abraham Nabors: The Nabors’ founded Mustard Seed Market, which has three locations in Northeast Ohio, and they operate an organic blueberry farm near Loudonville, Ohio.

Rose Smith: Rose is an Organic Valley Pool Manager.

Pete Lehman: Pete is an organic farmer in Middlebury, Indiana.

John Miller, JR.: John Miller Jr. and his family grow organic fruits and vegetables near Fresno, Ohio.

Aaron Swartz: Aaron is an organic pork and vegetable farmer from Sligo, Pennsylvania.

James Yoder: James is an organic poultry and produce farmer from Canastota, New York.

Charlene Stoller: Charlene is a mother, grandmother, and farmwife on the family organic farm in Sterling, Ohio.

Shane Hartzler: The Hartzlers’ operate an organic dairy in northern Wayne County, Ohio.
The Organic Home

- Top Red Flags When Purchasing Products: Abraham Nabors
- Tips on Keeping an Organic Home: Charlene Stoller

(Held at 10:30-11:40 in Room 2)

Demonstrations:

The Home Dairy
Mary (Jonas) Yoder and her daughter are organic dairy farmers from Berlin, Ohio.

Sauerkraut
Ann (Kevin) Miller and Elsie (David) Kline, mother and daughter, enjoy farm life on Larksong Farm, an organic dairy north of Mt. Hope, Ohio.

Using Herbs
Susan (Leroy) Yoder and her family have the well-known business known as Backyard Herbs and are well versed in the world of herbs.

Food Drying
Katie (Tim) Kline milks Jerseys on their organic dairy farm close to Holmesville, Ohio.
Martha (Mike) Kline does a lot of organic gardening and raises organic pastured poultry near Millersburg, Ohio.

Home & Body
Anna Raber shares her knack for making homemade things and often does so with things anyone has on hand.

Rag Rugs
Diane Bailey from Michigan has a very creative spirit and is known for her patchwork quilts, homemade soaps, and rag rugs.

Candlemaking
Luann Weaver helps on her parents’ organic dairy farm in New York and is also in the candle making business.

Dry Beans
Mary (Jerry) Miller is a farm wife on an organic dairy farm north of Mt. Hope, Ohio.

Crackers & Dips
Betty Raber has a wide range of interests, including anything to do with nature, and shares her knack for making healthy snacks.

Home Décor
Emily (David) Hershberger and Verba (Elmer) Graber, both organic dairy farmers, in Mt. Hope and Berlin, Ohio, share their ideas for down-to-earth decorating.
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Buy 4+.... $6.37 ea
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Cabbage
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It was time for a break during the afternoon of hay baling. Stopping everything in the shade of the hickory, wild cherry, and serviceberry trees along the fenceline, mow crew and field crew stretched out in the pleasant shade and we were enjoying our refreshments when someone noticed a polyphemus moth in last year’s leaf litter near the fence. Nearly emerged from its silken cocoon the moth was “tanning” (curing) his wings which were a good five inches across. The moth was brownish yellow with eyespots on both forewings and hindwings and the wings were edged along the back with a band of rich ocher. It was perfect in every way.

Sometimes a desire for a natural solution to a vexing problem can take a wrong turn and end up doing more harm than good. Such has been the case with the giant silk moths, like the polyphemus we admired.

Ever since an amateur scientist named Étienne Léopold Trouvelot inadvertently released gypsy moths from his Massachusetts home in 1869, and staked his claim to entomological infamy, a search has been on for a natural control for the imported forest-damaging moths. Starting in 1906 scientists began releasing a parasitic tachinid fly, *Compsilura concinnata*, to try to keep the runaway moths in check.

The parasitic fly resembles the familiar housefly but has more hair. Unlike the parasitic ichneumon wasps, which often parasitize only one host species, this imported fly is a generalist and particularly destructive since it attacks dozens of species of moths, including the beautiful giant silk moths such as the polyphemus, luna, cecropia, and promethea.

As the gypsy moth migrated west out of New England the tachinid fly followed and the silk moth populations plummeted. Each female fly carries about 200 eggs. When she spots a meaty caterpillar, she
A fly hatches one egg in her oviduct and then injects the larva directly into her victim. One fly can take out an entire fencerow of silk moth larvae. Where there could be found scores of pendulum-like promethea moth cocoons swinging from the twigs of wild cherry and sassafras sprouts along fencelines in decades past, today there are only a few or more likely none. Entomologists quit releasing the destructive parasitic fly in 1986, but it was too late to undo the damage.

While such extensive harm may occur from misguided attempts at biocontrolling pests, what we see on our organically managed farm is just the opposite. I like to think that the tachinid fly about to parasitize the polyphemus moth larva last year was eaten by one of the flycatchers or yellow warblers common along the fencerow. The larva then lived to spin itself into a cocoon and emerge almost a year later for our viewing pleasure.

I am by nature an optimist and am convinced that by working with nature, instead of fighting against it, we will be rewarded far beyond our expectations.

The other evening I had the privilege of walking across our farm with a skeptic. He was a young dairy farmer from a southern state where the soil is red and its organic matter low. Organic farming just will not work, he claimed. And then the questions came: Do you soil test? What is your base saturation? Your cation exchange capacity? What about starter fertilizer? Nitrogen?

No, I said, we haven’t taken soil samples for at least ten years. That was when the organic researchers at Ohio State University did some comparison studies on our farm and we got free soil testing out of their work. I tried to explain that my philosophy on farming might partly be a result from reading Henry Thoreau. But before taking Thoreau’s advice I had taken a long detour and learned some hard lessons on soils and husbandry.

After my wife and I took over the farm and dairy in the late 1960s, I signed up with a reputable soil testing and consulting laboratory. I soon discovered that the view from their offices differed considerably from my dad’s feet-on-the-soil vision. Dad had always practiced the traditional four-year rotation and every fourth year when the field went to wheat, we applied two tons of high-calcium lime. The field going into corn got the bulk of the barn manure. It worked well. Clover and alfalfa flourished and so did the other crops. Our third and fourth cuttings of hay were grazed by the herd of Guernseys.

Soon I was poring over soil sample reports and learned to understand at least part of the complicated terminology. No, field one that went to wheat in September did not need lime, which was nice. For ten years we needed no lime. No compacted lime truck tracks to harrow out. Soon we bought a fertilizer drill and a spinner spreader. Rock phosphate and Sul-Po-Mag and cake mix blends were spread and Dad merely smiled. He did not have to tell me that life was getting to be a lot more complicated and our fields were dwindling in fertility. The soil began to work harder from the lack of calcium.

Then I read Thoreau, took Henry’s counsel of “Simplify, simplify” to heart and applied it to our...
farm, learned to live close to nature, got rid of the fertilizer drill, and sent the spinner spreader with the scrap and recycle man.

This is what I learned, I said. Take time to turn now and then and watch the soil crumble as it furls away from the plow, as good soil should. Take a handful of soil, feel its tilth and smell and taste its richness. Count earthworms and observe dung beetles and watch butterflies. Get to know every foot of your farm; every granite boulder; every species of bird, local and migratory. Learn to recognize the wild mammals and their tracks and habits. (Don't plant the sweet corn near the woods or shelter the pullets too close to the red-tailed hawks' nest.) Study the growing plants. Are they thriving or sickly? Get a good field guide to weeds. Become familiar with the weeds. They have a story to tell.

I explained to my southern friend that the weeds are my soil report and we are back to using only high-calcium lime, manure, and legumes. A practice I never should have left. I needed that 10-year span of hard-earned lessons to dampen my hubris. Of course, I said, I may have an unfair advantage in that this farm has been traditionally farmed for 90 years and has no soil compaction. The farm is very forgiving of mistakes I make.

When we certified for the first time in 2000, the certifier and I walked across the fields and I told Mick the story of the farm. He carried a two-foot long soil probe to check for soil compaction and soil quality. He never used it. He could feel the life and tilth through his feet. That spoke well for Dad's wisdom and farming methods.

As we watched the polyphemus moth, he pumped his wings like a weight-lifter and then appeared ready for flight. By nightfall, the moth likely tuned his antennae to the pheromones of a female at the far end of the field by the woods and I hope next year there will be more moths along the fencerow for the haying crew to enjoy.

David Kline is a semi-retired farmer and he and his wife Elsie live on the family's farm near Mt. Hope, Ohio.
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Lunch Menu:

main course

- Homemade Whole Wheat Bread
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- Sweet Corn
- Grilled Whole Hog Sausage
- Broccoli/Cauliflower Salad

dessert

- Apple Crisp and Whipped Cream

The noon meal is catered by Creekside Catering from Sugarcreek, Ohio and is produced with organic and mostly local ingredients.

We want to say thank you for those of you who donated or discounted food items to help make this wholesome meal possible.

Meal Food Sources:

- Butter, sour cream, whipping cream & bacon—Organic Valley/
  Organic Prairie
- Bread—Healthy Heritage
- Whole hog sausage & apples—Nature’s Acres
- Sweet corn & potatoes—Larksong Farm
- Sweet potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower & cheese—Green Field Farms
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FREEZE DRY AT HOME
Avid Chef Shares Her Best Kept Secret

Sharon Woolsey isn’t afraid to experiment in the kitchen. Her two years in South America made her an adventurous chef; and, her husband and three children motivate her to cook healthy meals that everyone will enjoy.

Sharon is a hardworking mom trying to balance home management, part-time work, church and community involvement, and everything else.

“Of all the interesting, and innovative appliances I’ve worked with, this was possibly the most amazing, the most interesting, and the most innovative,” Sharon said after her first few months with the Harvest Right freeze dryer.

This convenient freeze dryer is about the size of a mini-fridge and can be used in a variety of locations such as a kitchen, spare room, laundry room, or even a garage. Sharon keeps her freeze dryer in her garage during the winter and brings it into her food storage closet during the hot summer months.

This appliance is a game changer for a lot of reasons. It can freeze dry 6 to 10 pounds of food at a time, which amounts to 1,500 pounds of food per year. When stored properly, freeze-dried foods can last for 15 to 25 years, making it an essential tool for anyone who practices food storage like Sharon.

Freeze drying leaves the nutritional integrity, as well as the taste and appearance, of the food completely intact. A grape still looks like a grape; a slice of peach still looks as fresh as it did before it was freeze dried; meats and seafood stay fresh and taste fresh even after being freeze dried. Whether freeze drying full meals like lasagna and beef stew or preserving dairy products like cheddar cheese, yogurt and ice cream, Sharon has the confidence that the food is going to taste great.

Besides preserving meals as long term storage for her family and making delicious baked goods, Sharon has also found her freeze dryer useful in preserving her garden bounty. Like many avid gardeners, Sharon saw her food going to waste because she couldn’t use the produce fast enough. Now, she has a solution that keeps her goods fresh until she’s ready to use them.

“I love to preserve” my fresh produce in the freeze dryer because it plumps back to life so beautifully. It’s also the absolute best way to preserve herbs, especially as they retain 100 percent of their flavor.”

Produce from the garden isn’t all a freeze dryer can save from going to waste. Leftover meals and ripening grocery-store produce stay out of the trash can thanks to the freeze dryer. With foods that ripen quickly, like bananas or avocados, the Harvest Right freeze dryer can preserve them in their prime. Sharon noted that her Harvest Right freeze dryer is “a game changer” for her beautifully preserved avocados.

The ability to keep food from going bad helps offset the price tag, Sharon said. Families throw out $2,250 worth of food a year on average. That number alone almost pays for the freeze dryer. It is perfect to freeze dry food that would otherwise go to waste so that it can be used as a meal in a few weeks or to be eaten in 25 years.

Freeze dried pineapple, grapes and yogurt drops have replaced Sharon’s kid’s favorite candy. She turns freeze-dried kale and Greek yogurt into powder to add to her morning smoothies; and freeze-dried ice cream dipped in chocolate has become a popular treat at her house parties. Sharon has found a way to turn this remarkable food storage technique into a way of life.

Learn more about this revolutionary appliance at HarvestRight.com or call 800-845-6350.
American farmers are so good at producing high crop yields that they are going broke. What we hear most often in the news, on those rare occasions when the news says anything at all about farming, is how we must “gear up to feed the world.” Upon hearing that, farmers puff up and strut about even though they know it’s a big fat lie, an excuse to overproduce, hoping that government subsidies will once more save them when prices collapse like they are doing now. We may be able to help other countries over temporary food shortages, but we can’t “feed the world.” The more we try, the worse farm prices fall and the more we hear about how many millions of people in third world countries are going hungry. We can’t even feed that part of the world that can afford to buy from us. Right now Saudi Arabia, having pumped so many of its own irrigation wells dry, is investing in land in our dry western states to grow irrigated alfalfa to ship back to its own farms and in the process pump our wells dry too. This is madness, not feeding the world.

Feeding the world is a come-on from agribusiness to encourage farmers to expand (buy more “inputs”) and overproduce. Both farm suppliers and consumers benefit while the number of farmers decreases steadily. The rather famous Wheeler McMillen, a farmer and then farm writer (editor of Farm Journal) and then an Under-Secretary of Agriculture, was one of the first to address the subject forthrightly way back in 1929. He wrote a book titled Too Many Farmers and was royally condemned for that by supporters and proponents of small family farms. I knew him personally and he was not really just a hardheaded agribusinessman as I called him when I interviewed him in 1982 at age 89. He was just trying to figure out how to make farming profitable while viewing it only as a for-profit business. He would never have thought to write a book called “Too Many Gardeners.” The farm population in 1929 was around 27,000,000 and in 1982 hardly 3,000,000 were still farmers and were not making a whole lot of money. Knowing it had to be an embarrassing question, I asked him if he still thought there were “too many farmers.” He dodged the issue: “Now I’d say there is too much land being farmed.” But then he went on to say that “overproduction is still the main problem in farming.” Wheeler was a wise old fox, even predicting that organic and natural farming would increase, as it certainly has. He pointed out to me that in the early years of the 20th century, he grew up on and for a while operated what was really an organic farm—no pesticides and no chemical fertilizers. But he was still straight-jacketed by the idea that farming was all about making money, which of course means that farmers will continue to overproduce trying to do just that. Towards the end of the interview he did admit that “we have all been guilty of overemphasizing financial success” and ended the interview by saying, with the wittiness that always characterized his writing, that “when a family lives in honest self-respect in a clean house and raises children to decent ideals, who is to object if some loafing and fishing results in their piling up fewer loaves and fishes.”

Historically, farmers have organized into cooperatives, the main purpose of which is to try to keep supply matched with demand. Seldom do cooperatives last long, because when they are effective in keeping prices profitable, either farmers get too independent to cooperate and voluntarily limit production, or big business, fearing the good prices will cut into its profits more than it likes, finds ways to undermine the cooperative maneuvers. The Burley Tobacco Association is a good example. As long as
farmers were willing to grow only a certain “allotment” of tobacco, they made good enough money so that many of them could stay in business. But it failed first in the 1920s when buyers tempted farmers with prices good enough so that many of them got out of the cooperative to grow as much tobacco as they could. When the cooperative was resurrected in 1940 with measures to prevent that from happening, it worked very effectively for while. But cheaper tobacco came into the market from third world countries, mostly with the help of American cigarette manufacturers, and along with other events, like the realization that tobacco can cause cancer, surpluses developed that the cooperative had no control over.

Overproduction is of course the reason corn and soybean prices are so low right now. Erosive hills and dry plains have been plowed up to grow corn and that, along with increased yields on the best land caused prices to collapse. Not even all that corn going for ethanol production could stem the tide of overproduction. Successful farming equates to unsuccessful farming. Oddly enough, the cloud of overproduction is rising on the horizon even for organic farming. When conventional grain is selling at below break-even prices, like $3.80 a bushel as I write, and organic corn is selling for $8.00, it doesn’t take a genius to see that such a price is going to attract conventional growers. I heard the concern voiced more than once at the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) conference this year. “I’m getting a couple of calls every week from conventional farmers wanting to explore the idea of going organic,” says John Bobbe, the executive director of the Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM) and author of Marketing Organic Grain. “Some are calling it the ‘rush to gold.”

The worry now is, first of all, that farmers wanting into the gold rush don’t really realize what they will have to do. Almost all organic certification requires specific rotations that include legumes. Most conventional farmers don’t want to go that route. As has been the case so often, farmers who try to transition to organic when prices are high don’t have the commitment that it takes and want to go back to conventional corn and soybeans when non-organic market prices rise again.

But even when that is not the case, oversupply in organic markets is definitely a possibility. “Right now, with so much of our organic grain imported, the concern is not immediate, but it happened a few years ago and could happen again,” says Mr. Bobbe. “I studied under Harold Briemyer, [the famous economist at the University of Missouri], and I remember him saying how farmers have a non-instinct for self-preservation. Because of their independent nature, they invariably fail to do what would help them the most. They would gain far more if they would cooperate with each other in marketing.”

OFARM is one attempt to sell organic grain cooperatively. It represents six coops, each with a professional organic grain marketer who is in the marketplace every day and understands how it operates. So far so good. A study by Iowa State’s Aldo Leopold Center says that members of these cooperatives are netting 22% to 40% more for their grain than those going it alone.

“It comes down to whether farmers looking to organic for salvation decide to do the right
things working with their neighbors or go the route of ‘non-instinct for self-preservation,” says Mr. Bobbe. “If they choose the latter, it could mean big trouble in the future for all organic farmers.”

Organic Valley, a successful organic dairy cooperative has a supply management provision in its agreements with organic farmers based on what it calls “active base.” Mike Kline, who works for Organic Valley explains: “It involves a tracking system of production history we can use in estimating future growth in times of oversupply. If we looked at the numbers and could expect, let us say, a 5% oversupply, we would put into effect a 5% quota. A producer would get full organic premiums for 95% of his active base and anything over that would be paid at the conventional market price. This would maintain a stable market for the members.” Other safeguards would allow a member who recently expanded but has no production history yet to reflect the increase, to appeal for more active base. That would be granted before Organic Valley added new members.

How well this all works out remains to be seen but it surely is a step in the right direction. Big agribusiness might view it as a step towards socialism but socialism in the form of government subsidies has always been a big part of American farming, and it has resulted in only fewer and bigger farms, with the bigger ones now swallowing up each other. Can human nature control itself enough to practice the cooperative approach at least as much as it practices the competitive approach? I wonder. Our whole sports-crazy world is built on competition even though becoming a winner requires many losers. Will we continue the same attitude in food production? I might risk ridicule in suggesting this but is it possible that food production is not supposed to be so competitive that what winners need most are losers? Would the economy not work better if there were quite a few near losers and no big winners at all?

Gene was the author of numerous books and magazine articles on farm-related issues and was a regular contributor to many agricultural publications including Farming Magazine. He died May 31, 2016.
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One day I was playing in the mud of a rice field with a half-dozen other little boys. We were catching frogs, racing to see who would be the first to get there. It was a wonderful way to get dirty from head to foot in the shortest possible time. But suddenly we were all scrambling to get out of the paddy. One of the boys had spotted an old man walking across the path toward us. We all knew him and called him “Tata,” meaning “grandpa.” He was the keeper of the dams. He walked slowly, stooped over a bit as though he were always looking at the ground. Old age is very much respected in India, and we boys shuffled our feet and waited in silence for what we knew was going to be a rebuke.

He came over to us and asked what we were doing. “Catching frogs,” we answered.

He stared down at the churned-up mud and flattened young rice plants in the corner where we had been playing, and I was expecting him to talk about the rice seedlings that we had spoiled. Instead he stooped and scooped up a handful of mud. “What is this?” he asked.

The biggest boy among us took the responsibility of answering for us all. “It’s mud, Tata.”

“What is this?” the old man asked.

“It’s your mud, Tata. This is your field.”

The old man turned and looked at the nearest of the little channels across the dam. “What do you see there, in that channel?” he asked.

“That is water, running over into the lower field,” the biggest boy answered.

For the first time Tata looked angry. “Come with me and I will show you water.”

We followed him a few steps along the dam, and he pointed to the next channel, where clear water was running. “That is what water looks like,” he said. Then he led us back to our nearest channel, and said,
“Is that water?”

We hung our heads. “No Tata, that is mud, muddy water,” the oldest boy answered. He had heard all this before and did not want to prolong the question-and-answer session, so he hurried on. “And the mud from your field is being carried away to the field below, and it will never come back, because mud always runs downhill, never up again. We are sorry, Tata, and we will never do this again.”

But Tata was not ready to stop his lesson as quickly as that, so he went on to tell us that just one handful of mud would grow enough rice for one meal for one person, and it would do it twice a year for years into the future. “That mud flowing over the dam has given my family food every year from long before I was born, and before my grandfather was born. It would have given my grandchildren food, and then given their grandchildren food forever. Now it will never feed us again. When you see mud in the channels of water, you know that life is flowing away from the mountains.”

The old man walked slowly back across the path, pausing a moment to adjust with his foot the grass clod in our muddy channel so that no more water flowed through it. We were silent and uncomfortable as we went off to find some other place to play. I had gotten a dose of traditional Indian folk education that would remain with me as long as I lived. Soil was life, and every generation was responsible for preserving it for future generations.

Fred Kirschenmann lives in Ames, Iowa and is the keynote speaker at this conference. He has many years of experience as an organic farmer in North Dakota, where he was born. This was reprinted from In Praise of Fertile Land: An anthology of poetry, parable, and story. Edited by Claudia Mauro.
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