

*"The Greatest Fine Art of the future will be the making of a comfortable living from a small piece of land."
- Abraham Lincoln*

Gardening and Globalization

I landed at Chicago's O'Hare Airport at 8:50am September 11, 2001. A few minutes later the Airport was shut down. On the way to my meeting in Chicago, on the 80th floor of the second tallest downtown building, my shuttle van was radioed to terminate service for the day. I arrived on the 80th floor just as the entire building was evacuated. It took me three days to get back to Vermont by train.

Four months later on Jan. 18 I was on my first trip back to Chicago. Two prominent page 1 headlines in the Wall Street Journal on the seat next to me caught my eye. "For Egypt's Terrorists, Fertile Ground Lay In Widespread Poverty...Now the State is Attacking Root Problems to Stem Resurgence of Extremists". "Enron's Board Fired Arthur Anderson as Auditor Amid Storm of Recriminations Between the Companies". These two articles next to each other on the front page of the main daily voice for American economic globalization (free trade, deregulation, privatization of all industries...even those providing for basic needs like agriculture) are part of a new chapter of an old story. Concentrating wealth and power with few controls inevitably leads to social stress and economic breakdown.

In recent years Enron was the ultimate example of economic globalization, and concentration of wealth and power. In a few years Enron had become the seventh largest US corporation largely through unfettered global trading in a wide range of goods and services. The World Trade Organization and other institutions promote globalization as a way for developing countries like Egypt to reduce poverty and create a safer world. Countries like Egypt are presented as the big winners in the new global economy. However, there is increasing evidence that the opposite is the case.

"The rising tide of the global economy will create many economic winners, but it will not lift all boats...[It will] spawn conflicts at home and abroad, ensuring an even wider gap between regional winners and losers than exists today... [Globalization's] evolution will be rocky, marked by chronic financial volatility and a widening economic divide. Regions, countries, and groups feeling left behind will face deepening economic stagnation, political instability, and cultural alienation. They will foster political, ethnic, ideological, and religious extremism, along with the violence that often accompanies it." US Central Intelligence Agency, GLOBAL TRENDS 2015, 2000.

As the World Bank noted in a 1999 report, "[g]lobalization appears to increase poverty and inequality". All the evidence from the past 40 years, when global free trade and financial liberalization have been growing faster and faster, is that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. During this time the income gap between the 20% of the world's people living in the richest countries and the 20% living in the poorest countries quadrupled, from 20 to 1 to 80 to 1.

Economic globalization has made large corporations and individuals associated with them fabulously wealthy. Today, the largest 100 economies in the world are represented by more companies than countries. But the wealth generated by global business does not reach down to those in greatest need. Rather, the rules of free trade guided by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, lock the wealth at the top of the economic pyramid. Governments and communities lose the ability to redistribute wealth and protect important industries (like agriculture and forestry), workers and the environment.

What does all this have to do with Abe Lincoln's observation about the importance of land-based livelihood? As we enter the 21st century almost half of the world's population works the land, growing food for their families and selling it to their communities. In Mexico, Kenya, Turkey, India, and China family farmers use sustainable practices perfected over generations. Small scale, diversified farming systems that use local fertilizers, pest controls, and proven seed varieties passed between generations feed billions of people.

One of the most devastating affects of policies pushing free trade and rapid export development is the forced shift of local economies away from farming that feeds people in surrounding communities. Globalization forces agriculture in developing countries toward large scale, industrial farming practices aimed at exporting food to wealthy countries. This new model is guided by Del Monte, Dole and McDonalds. I've met with a Guatemalan yucca and bean farmer who lost his land to a US company that air freights snow peas to Washington DC. I visited a Costa Rican citrus, papaya and pepper farmer who now watches burgers-to-be graze where his orchards were.

As the International Forum on Globalization reported in a special 2001 Bulletin, "[a]n export-oriented system of agriculture favors high priced, high margin luxury export items – flowers, potted plants, beef, cotton, exotic vegetables – to be sent to the already overfed countries. As for the people who used to live on the lands, growing their own foods for their communities and for local markets, they are rapidly being driven off their lands... Self-sustaining communities disappear, still intact cultures are decimated. This is as true in the United States as in the Third World."

I started Gardener's Supply 20 years ago partly to help Americans make "a comfortable living from a small piece of land". Many of our early customers were market gardeners who bought frost protectors, weed barriers, hand tools, propagation supplies and greenhouses from us. I felt the challenges facing the profession of small-scale, local farming, as well as the critical role it plays in the health of people, communities and the environment, made this livelihood among the most important to defend. Fifteen years ago when our business had the capacity we started the Intervale Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to finding ways to promote local, sustainable farming.

Today, the Intervale Foundation (www.intervale.org) is a leading proponent of community agriculture. We are inventing ways to grow, process and distribute food to achieve our goal of providing 10% of Burlington's fresh food, flowers, poultry, eggs, and more right from local farms (when we started it was less than .1%). We created the country's first farming incubator where young farmers are sponsored to develop business plans and get started successfully on a

trashed flood plain next to Burlington called the Intervale. We started the largest composting project in Vermont using yard waste, municipal leaves, food waste, agricultural waste and manure to make 10,000 tons of compost annually to help revitalize this land. We now support a dozen Intervale organic farms to function as a vital community asset providing fresh food, land stewardship and increased community health and security. Dozens more farmers and apprentices have worked on Intervale farms, taking their experience with them to help establish and strengthen other farms across the country.

We are supporting local farming and land conservation because it is a healthy and good thing to do for our community. Beyond that, this work also is a response to the globalization of agriculture where industrial farming practices and export-driven production are forcing small, self-sufficient farmers off their land in unprecedented numbers. The crisis in American agriculture relates to the gutting of rural communities by corporate agriculture. The USDA reports in the second half of the 20th century we lost two-thirds of our family farms while the amount of land farmed, often by absentee ownership, has remained about the same. The crisis for agriculture in developing countries is more severe as productive livelihood evaporates and hunger grows, creating unmanageable social stress and collapse.

Our work in the Intervale offers a model for strengthening community-based, sustainable agriculture in America. Increasingly, the Intervale Foundation is sharing its expertise with towns, non-profit organizations and economic development groups across the country. Now, I want to employ this expertise in developing countries where the loss of self-sufficient local farming presents the greatest risk to the world community. During the next few years I will spend part time in Costa Rica building a new organization to help revitalize agricultural practices and stem the loss of family farms on the Guanacaste peninsula of Western Costa Rica. I will work with El Centro Verde in Paraiso (Paradise) Costa Rica (www.elcentoverde.com), an ecological training and demonstration center. We will seek to transfer the lessons learned at Gardener's Supply Company and the Intervale Foundation over the past 20 years to a region fast losing its family farms, hoping to offer another small counter balance to the globalization of our food system.

I invite interested gardeners to learn more and help. The first thing we need is to rebuild the pool of seed varieties to grow tomatoes, peppers, corn, lettuce, beans, squash, peas, melons, herbs and other crops more successfully for market and family gardens. If you are a gardener in the warmest US growing zones (zones 9 and 10) with high water challenges (either too much or too little) and difficult pest and disease problems, please let me know which varieties of the above crops work well for you. We can't get this kind of know how in Vermont!

Finally, Eco-Smart Teak Furniture from the Americas!

The cover of Time magazine April 3rd, 2006 read "Be worried. Be VERY worried."

As the editors said, "The debate is over. Global warming is upon us --with a vengeance."

A few weeks later The New York Times reported in an article titled "Forests in Southeast Asia Fall to Prosperity's Ax" that "The Indonesian government has signed a deal with China that will level much of the remaining tropical forests in an area so vital it is sometimes called the lungs of Southeast Asia."

Our Earth's forests are our lungs; they produce oxygen, vital for sustaining all life. Equally important, they clean carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and retain it in their trunks and limbs and roots. This process and end result is called "carbon sequestration". In 2004 Science magazine reported that carbon sequestration has the potential to offset 5-15% of the current annual greenhouse gas emissions. Global warming can be slowed and even reversed by reducing or neutralizing greenhouse gasses. Cutting down native forests is short sighted and ignorant for many reasons; moreso, when trees are felled to feed China's unquenchable manufacturing appetite and machine.

It seems that people (and all life) need trees more than ever now. Reforestation of deforested lands, which were in recent history "virgin" forests, is one of the best global strategies to fight climate change. Since 1999 I have been involved in an effort in Costa Rica to restore a section of the immensely biologically diverse Mesoamerican dry tropical forest zone that stretches from Panama to Arizona. (This zone is characterized by its two season climate that is comprised of a six month drought followed by six months of heavy rain.) Much of the dry tropical forest of Costa Rica was deforested in the 20th century to create cattle pastures in order to feed the demand for cheap hamburgers. Today, reforesting these cleared lands is a 21st Century solution to climate change that can help restore the lungs of ALL the Americas. (See www.greeningparaiso.com to learn more about my efforts)

Reforesting Central America with valuable tropical hardwoods also opens the door for us to sell the best teak furniture to our customers. Gardener's Supply did not jump on the teak furniture bandwagon in the 1980's and 1990's even though garden furniture made from this remarkable tree is the most durable and some feel, beautiful. There simply were too many unanswered questions about the impact of extracting this high-value tropical wood on the environment and on the surrounding communities that harvest teak in Indonesia, Burma (Myanmar) and Malaysia. We felt it was better to follow the Precautionary Principle: the idea that if the consequences of an action are unknown, but are judged to have some potential for major or irreversible negative consequences, then it is better to avoid that action.

One of my efforts in Costa Rica, home of my wife's family, is to support sustainable reforestation (by sustainable I mean environment-improving and community-enhancing in addition to profitable.) One of the best ways to do this is to make our Gardener's Supply customers aware that teak reforestation projects planted several decades ago in Central America are now producing the best teak in the world. And, that there are a few enterprises that are producing high-quality teak products in our own hemisphere.

After searching for years, I found the ideal supplier of reforested teak products for the home and garden from Costa Rica. I've visited their reforestation projects, kilns, workshops and the surrounding communities where their workers live. Their teak furniture and products not only fulfill the Precautionary Principle but all the wood is grown on reforested abandoned pastures (perfect for cleaning greenhouse gasses) and it is inherently of the highest quality, period. The best wood and the best craftsmanship make our American Eco-Teak the overall "best value" teak furniture we've found. You can find cheaper teak furniture, but our furniture is made only from First European Quality (FEQ) graded stock and joined by only stainless steel hardware. Plus it's hand sanded to the smoothest finish in the industry and second to none in design and comfort.

Please take a look at our **American Eco-Teak** line at www.gardeners/americanteak.com ? before buying lesser product from questionable wood grown in Asia.

