

Book review

Restoration Forestry

by Michael Pilarski, (published by Kivaki Press; 1994; available from Friends of the Trees Society, Box 1064, Tonasket, WA 98855 USA)

Subtitled "An International Guide to Sustainable Forestry Practices", this hefty (512 pages) volume has to be the most comprehensive, up-to-date source book on sustainable forestry to be found anywhere.

Sustainable forestry is forest resource management which mimics the natural cycles, systems and species compositions of a forest in all of its wild, undeveloped complexity. Pilarski's organization, Friends of the Trees Society, has served forestry professionals, restoration ecologists and nature activists around the globe as an invaluable teaching and information clearinghouse for over 15 years. This book represents a distillation of the group's efforts into a thoroughly researched and indexed reference manual.

The book brings together over 50 articles from professional foresters, ecologists and resource planners at innovative research centres around the world. It provides actual results and valuable insights from ongoing forest ecosystem restoration in North America, Latin America and Asia.

Also included are exhaustive organizational, periodical and literature reference sections. Bringing all these resources together in one place should help put the concepts of sustainable forestry into practice.

The Contrary Farmer

by Gene Logsdon

Published by Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 240 pp, \$21.95

Reviewed by Diane Kirchmann

In his newest book, Gene Logsdon shows that a concentrated effort on small amounts of land can bring greater profits and high levels of satisfaction. *The Contrary Farmer* is both an overview of the specifics of cottage farming and a treatise on the rewards cottage farming can provide, both economic and personal.

In a conversational tone, the book balances both the economic and personal rewards of cottage farming - the sense of low input costs, trading work with neighbors, and growing one's own food framed in a thoughtful discussion on land stewardship and the

satisfaction and integrity of manual labor. Logsdon, a popular writer for *New Farm* magazine, envisions people returning to the countryside to farm. Utilizing crops, livestock, pasture, vegetable gardens and a grove of trees, a family will support itself, perhaps with the help of an outside occupation at first. Neighbors will cooperate on labor, and small communities will thrive with the new demands for local shops and services. In today's world, as larger tracts of land become concentrated in fewer hands, this seems contrary indeed.

Nostalgia isn't the driving force here. Logsdon's contrariness has a rhyme and a reason. He believes that contemporary definitions of success may be ringing hollow and challenges the notion that manual labor is drudgery. He writes: "Today, people now understand so little about farming that they can't appreciate how fascinating the work can be."

He believes in skilled use of labor, not just in the savings it provides over purchasing expensive machinery, but for the pleasure it gives to the farmer. A farmer of deep ecological sensitivity benefits from artistic, scientific, and spiritual satisfactions - the kind of rewards punching a time clock rarely brings.

The book points out that many of these ideas have been applied successfully for decades by the Amish. It also documents cottage farm endeavors that are doing well in society at large. Some restaurants pay a premium for locally-grown fresh products. Organically-grown food and farmers' markets have increased in popularity, as well as have a variety of other niche markets.

Logsdon gives little direct how-to advice but supplies enough specifics to be useful to those seriously considering launching or intensifying a cottage farm operation. However, the author does provide some useful suggestions on grazing and cropping land as well as books for further reading. The book suggests those new to cottage farming start slowly, borrowing as little money as possible; a building site and a few acres ought to be in reach for most, Logsdon claims, since everyone must pay for housing somewhere. and the cost of land in rural areas continues to be a deal compared to urban housing, where costs continue to rise faster than many salaries. And obvious though the idea may be, Logsdon argues eloquently for a frugal lifestyle: "It is easier today than ever to save money. The more things go up in price, the more you save by not buying them."

This is a book of opinions, and the author draws from his long-time study of the subjects and from his own experiences on his 32-acre Ohio farm. Logsdon's arguments range from the statistical to the anecdotal, from land-grant university research to favorite stories about contrary friends.

What does *The Contrary Farmer* hold for an urban dweller? A good deal, although the ideas may be more thought-provoking in the abstract than easily executed. The book proposes paying for the land with an income not directly dependent on the farm, either with traditional second careers for farmers or with the expanded home office capabilities we are all assured the future will bring.

But dropping to part-time work may be beyond most of us today.

Exhausted by increasing demands in the work place, many of today's workers may be discouraged at the idea of heading home for a second shift in a vegetable garden, let alone losing many of the benefits that only full-time workers can earn.

The ideas proposed still have relevance for non-farmers. Perhaps they may have a new appreciation for a rural lifestyle, or think more critically about their food supply as a result of reading Logsdon's book. And many of the problems facing rural communities cross over to some urban neighborhoods as small independent businesses fall to corporate giants.

In the end, Logsdon gives hope to anyone considering making a "contrary" change in their life, whether it consists of raising a few tomatoes in a window box or farming 100 acres with a team of horses.

St. Paul, Minn., reviewer Diane Kirchmann learned to live a contrary lifestyle while growing up on a Sumner, Iowa, dairy farm.

Reprinted from The Land Stewardship Letter, Aug/Sept 1994 issue.

An Agriculture That Makes Sense: Profitability of Four Sustainable Farms in Minnesota

Here's an answer to those who believe industrial agriculture is inevitable:

This study, conducted by LSP and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Energy & Sustainable Agriculture Program, offers revealing insights into the profitability of sustainable farms, proving there are alternatives to capital-intensive production.

To order a copy of the 43-page report, send \$5 (add \$2.90 shipping & handling for the first book, \$1 for each additional copy; MN residents add 6.5 per cent sales tax) to: Land Stewardship Project, 14758 Ostlund Trail N., Marine, MN 55047. For orders of 10 or more, call LSP about a bulk discount at (612) 433-2770. A 12-minute video tape, "An Agriculture That Makes Sense," is also available for \$20.

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