



## ink spots: opinions, news, and reviews from an inkjet

*"Let us learn to appreciate [that] there will be times when the trees will be bare, and look forward to the time when we may pick the fruit."* Anton Chekhov, Russian playwright, 1860-1904.

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### The more things change, the more they stay the same

*The Cherry Orchard*, by Anton Chekhov, portrays the declining fortunes of the Ranevskis, a landowning family, who are about to lose their estate. Neglect, poor management, neglect, and impracticality have brought them to the point of bankruptcy, but no one is able to act to head off the disaster. Lopakhin, a pragmatic businessman, suggests that they chop down the orchard and build houses on the land. For the family, the orchard represents the pleasant past, before mysterious forces of change threatened their idyllic existence. The estate is sold from under the hapless Ranevskis. Lopakhin buys the land and as the family prepares to depart, the sound of an ax chopping down a cherry tree is heard offstage.

One of Chekhov's finest dramatic works, the play is a penetrating study of the changing way of life in Russia at the end of the 19th century. It vividly depicts what that change means to the people involved.

We saw a production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Guthrie, many years ago when I was still an English teacher. The themes, the inability of human beings to communicate with one another and to respond to change, were poignant, and

Chekhov's delineation of character was superb. The story is perhaps a cautionary tale for every generation trying to balance nostalgia and "progress," particularly now when bankruptcies and foreclosures are at an all-time high.

The graphic, above, is from part of the cover of the Vermont Country Store fall 2007 catalog. It shows a Vermont farm in 1946. Minnesota farms with small red barns like that scarcely exist now or if they do, they are often shabby or abandoned. According to a University of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters study described in the 4 October 2007 *St Paul Pioneer Press*, Wisconsin is losing 30,000 acres of farmland each year. Nearly 60% of acres lost between 2000 and 2005 were in nineteen counties, including those near the Twin Cities and Wausau as well as between Madison and Milwaukee.

"Crops of houses where farms and forests used to be is nothing new in Wisconsin," the report said. In 1950, Wisconsin had about 24 million agricultural acres; by 2005, that number had dropped to 15 million. The non-profit academy spent more than two years studying multiple aspects of rural life. The 240-page document offers 80-some recommen-

dations to improve farming and country living, e.g.,

- Create a statewide grant program to purchase 25-year easements on land to prevent development.
- Establish agricultural enterprise areas with farming clusters where development would be prohibited for fixed periods of time.
- Reward development projects that have small lots and ample green space.
- Develop farm and forestry programs that educate people about land preservation.
- Convene a summit to develop ways to improve health care for farmers.

Who are farmers these days? Some "family farms" exist: several generations and/or siblings working together to grow crops on thousands of rented acres near the farm where the grandparents grew up.

Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy*, see page 2, posits that "Modern agriculture produces a lot of food, and produces it cheaply, two feats that people have spent all of human history trying to achieve."

The price of the food that Americans consume has never been lower; we spend 11% of our paychecks on food, less than half of what our parents or grandparents

spent before World War II. Large farms produce our food at lower cost: "We've got what everyone who ever lived always wanted—plenty. End of story."

Perhaps—or perhaps not. "To create those efficiencies, an awful lot of inefficiencies had to be eliminated, and that process has not been free of pain."

McKibben itemizes various costs: Since the end of WWII, the US has lost a farm about every half hour. Output went up, prices went down. On the typical Iowa farm, "the farmer's profit margin dropped from 35% in 1950 to 9% today" according to the World Watch Institute. President Eisenhower's agriculture secretary, Ezra Taft Benson, told farmers to "get bigger, get better, or get out." They did. Farmers over age 65 now outnumber those under 35 by nearly six to one.

As family farms declined, so did the rural communities around them. Poverty rates are now higher in vast stretches of America's heartland than in our inner cities, and "20% of prairie churches in the Dakotas now stand vacant." Our country is prosperous enough that displaced farmers can find other things to do, most of them easier than farming. What about their satisfaction/happiness quotient? Stay tuned. +++

## Why is all of our stuff making us less and less happy?

“Attention, shopaholics and supersizers. Go nowhere near an important new book called *Deep Economy : The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (Times Books, 2007) . You may never indulge the same way again. Author Bill McKibben, the Harvard-trained economist and activist..., wants to send a shock wave through our retail-addicted culture.

“ ‘The idea that more is better, which has been orthodoxy for the past 50 years, no longer matches reality,’ McKibben tells me from [his] rural Vermont home..... ‘More stuff doesn’t make people happier.’ In fact, once our basic needs are met, the very opposite seems to be true. “

—Mark Matousek, “Live Better with Less,” AARP, May & June 2007.

*“For most of human history, the two birds **More** and **Better** roosted on the same branch. That’s why the centuries since Adam Smith have been devoted to the dogged pursuit of maximum economic production.”* So begins the Introduction to Bill McKibben’s *Deep Economy*.

*“The idea that individuals pursuing their own individual interests in a market society, make one another richer and the idea that increasing efficiency, usually by increasing scale, is the key to increasing wealth has indisputably produced **More**. It has built the unprecedented prosperity and ease that distinguish the lives of most of the people reading this book.....*

*“But...**Better** has flown a few trees over to make her nest. That changes everything. Now...you have to choose between them. It’s **More or Better**....[G]rowth is no longer making most people wealthier, but instead generating inequality and insecurity. And growth is bumping into physical limits so profound—like climate change and peak oil—that continuing to expand the economy may be impossible; the very attempt may be dangerous. But there’s something else too...new research from many quarters has started to show that even when growth does make us wealthier, the greater wealth no longer makes us happier.”*

The main thrust of *Deep Economy* is that we need to make a basic shift: “we need to move decisively to rebuild our local econo-

*mies. These may well yield less stuff, **but they produce richer relationships**; they may grow less quickly... but they make up for it in durability.”* McKibben wants us to shift our focus from “an economy that produces an ever larger pile of stuff to [one that evaluates whether] it builds or undermines community—for **community, it turns out, is the key to physical survival in our environmental predicament and also to human satisfaction**. Our exaltation of the individual, which was the key to **More**, has passed the point of diminishing returns.”

McKibben tells the story of his year of eating local in Vermont. We did not do that for a whole year, but for the past two Augusts/Septembers our Just Food Co-op, as well as eleven co-ops in the Twin Cities and suburbs, issued an eat-local challenge, suggesting that 80% of the participants’ food be grown/purchased from sources within 60 miles of our homes. Most of us probably practiced the spirit rather than the letter of the challenge. The finale was a festival in the Just Food parking lot on a sunny mid-September Saturday. There was live music, a nanny goat being milked, and lots of samples of local goat and sheep cheese as well as tiny beef burgers cooked on site by Todd and Dee Churchill of Thousand Hills Cattle Company.

In *MIX*, Sept/Oct 2007, Todd says that he pulled away from his rural roots as a young adult. He

stopped eating beef because restaurant steaks were “all gristle and bone,” and the beef he cooked at home was “tough, rank, and gamey.” He was an accountant working in Cannon Falls, but his family still owned a cattle operation. Todd started attending conferences where Argentine and New Zealand ranchers spoke about their grassfed cattle practices. He soon came to believe that American ranchers had lost their way, when after World War II, many farmers replaced their grazing lands with corn and bean crops. “Cattle were kicked off the newly-tilled fields and corralled into smaller, muddy pens and given factory-produced feed. The new diet produced fattier meat.” He wasn’t imagining it. “Beef had changed.”

Todd wanted to create something that would keep kids in rural America. He founded Thousand Hills Cattle Company, a group of ranchers who raise grassfed cattle. By banding together, the company, which began in 2003, now includes about 40 farmers in a six-state region. Their herds get daily exercise as they graze chemical-free pastures, producing tender, succulent, tasty beef with a higher rate of omega 3 fatty acids—fulfilling part of his original dream: “What if you could raise food that healed people?”

Read *Deep Economy* for what McKibben observed in Vermont, Cuba, China, and elsewhere. Then find **your own** happier answer to *less is more*. +++

## Addenda to news covered in this *ink spots* and in previous issues

**Ethanol.** In 2005 Congress passed a law requiring gasoline refiners to use 7.5 gallons of renewable fuels annually by 2012. But the ethanol industry has grown so fast that it is expected to produce that much ethanol by the end of 2007. An editorial in the *StarTribune*, 4 Oct 2007, “Time to take stock of ethanol subsidies,” begins, “In an effort to develop homegrown energy and support rural America, the government has showered favors on the ethanol industry for the last few years—a federal mandate supporting renewables, a federal tax credit to fuel blenders, a tariff on imported ethanol, and in Minnesota, a generous per gallon subsidy.”

“*The New York Times* reported Sunday that the Midwest now has an ethanol glut. The real story is a little more complicated than that, but there’s enough truth in it that Minnesota lawmakers, regulators, and investors should slow down, take stock of the ethanol industry, and see if they have the right mix of public subsidies to serve the long term public interest.”

In our summer edition I wrote about several of Co-op America’s concerns about ethanol. Because corn is such an energy-intensive crop to grow, and because methods to process corn are also energy intensive, it takes seven barrels of petroleum to grow and produce eight barrels of corn ethanol. The *StarTribune* piece emphasizes that subsidies, which may have worked for an “infant ethanol” industry, now may have created an investment bubble. Ethanol prices have dropped by about a third in the last five months, presenting “the possibility that some rural investors will not get the returns they expected, and some farmers will have placed the wrong bet when they converted 12 million acres to corn, including some land that should have been left to soybeans or pasture.” Demand from ethanol distillers “pushed up the price of corn, putting the squeeze on livestock prices and even triggering tortilla riots in Mexico.” Meanwhile Congress is considering an even higher federal renewables mandate to increase demand for ethanol—at a time when “this industry already depends too heavily on public subsidy.” *THE WEEK*, 12 Oct 2007, notes that “Although corn prices are at record highs, corn growers will collect \$10.5 billion in federal subsidies over the next five years.”

**Water.** The amount of water required to produce a single gallon of ethanol is 4 to 4.8 gallons, using 400 million gallons of water per year. Fresh water is *not* a renewable resource. UN researchers estimate that by 2025, two-thirds of the world’s population will live in water-stressed conditions. Assuming that we live as long as our parents and grandparents, that’s within our lifetime.

North Americans assume there will always be water. *A life like mine: how children live around the world*, a UNICEF book we bought for our grandchildren, asks us to imagine waking up one day to find that there were no faucets. “Like many people in the world, you would have to get the water you needed from a river, lake, well, pump, or communal faucet.” Blue buckets depict amounts of

water used. “In some countries, you have to manage with just one bucketful of water for a whole day. That means water for drinking, bathing, and cooking. If you leave the faucet running twice a day when you brush your teeth, you use [one bucket]. That’s a whole day’s supply for some people. Three visits to the bathroom flushes [three buckets] down the drain. [Nine buckets fill] a bathtub. Washing machines guzzle [12 buckets] for one load of laundry.”

*US News and World Report* wrote a 16-page cover story, “Why you should worry about water: how this diminishing resource will determine where and how we live,” for its 4 June 2007 issue. Although the first picture is of children in India catching water from a tanker truck hose, the first story is about a 2-foot-wide water pipe that ruptured under New Jersey’s longest commercial thoroughfare. “Water burst through the asphalt with the force of a geyser, then cascaded downhill.” In 18-degree temperatures, local fire and rescue crew members lowered themselves into chest-deep water to help people escape in life rafts. The problem? Water “supply is shrinking, pipes are aging, and few are willing to pay the price.” Thirty-one people were forced from their homes, and water service was disrupted for 200,000 people in five of the nation’s most densely populated cities, directly across the river from Manhattan.

Because North Americans pay less for drinking water [US \$2.49/Canada \$2.99 per 1,000 gallon] than do residents of other developed countries [Germany \$8.50/Denmark \$8.90], we tend to assume it will always be there. But pipes most vulnerable to frigid temperatures are deteriorating because they are nearing the end of their useful lives. United Water, for example, serving 7 million people in 20 states, still operates some of the same network it laid when the company was founded in NJ in 1869. Each of us should use water mindfully, not carelessly—and not be surprised when rates go up as infrastructure needs to be replaced.

**Grassfed beef.** “Free-roaming, grassfed cows are happier—and they’re healthier for you, too, as they are fed no grains, unnatural supplements, growth hormones, or antibiotics,” according to a small news item in *Today’s Health and Wellness*, October/November 2006.

A March 2006 report by the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists found that grassfed beef can have up to 50% less fat than conventionally produced beef. It also has higher levels of the omega 3 fats EPA, docosahexaenoic acid, and alpha lipoic acid. The organization says the EPA and DHA may reduce the risk of heart disease, and ALA may reduce the risk of heart attacks. The article says you can find companies that sell grassfed beef, at [www.tallgrassbeef.com](http://www.tallgrassbeef.com). Sometimes we add meatballs to our spaghetti instead of steamed fresh vegetables; we use glutenfree, fully cooked frozen 100% grassfed beef meatballs made with Minnesota wild rice, eggs, onions, olive oil, garlic powder, black pepper, and kosher salt, an original recipe from US-inspected Thousand Hills of Cannon Falls, Minnesota; [www.thousandhillscattleco.com](http://www.thousandhillscattleco.com) +++

# Let's Be Well, Inc



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## Nostalgia: *when/where* were the good old *slow* days?

Two years ago in this spot in our fall issue of *ink spots*, I celebrated some nostalgia in connection with our 50th anniversary celebration—see photo. The week of our wedding anniversary that year we appreciated the 34-page cover story *US News and World Report* produced for its “America Eats” issue, which reflected on some of the changes in the food we now serve compared with earlier times in our life together. Its thesis: “how one nation revolutionized the food of the world,” for good and/or evil, one might add. For example:

**We are ambivalent about the food we eat, suspicious of it, yet we eat it with gusto;** Sara Sklaroff writes: “What is it about Americans and food? We love to eat, but we feel guilty about it afterward. We say we want only the best, but we settle for—and even heartily enjoy—junk food. We’re obsessed with health and weight loss but face an epidemic of obesity.”

**We are where we eat:** Our grandmothers and mothers cooked from scratch meals we ate together at the kitchen table. In 1954, Ray Kroc franchised McDonalds, and Starbucks began serving designer roast coffee in Seattle’s Pike Place market in 1971. By 2005, 30% of us were eating in our cars at least once a week. Well, maybe not *us*.

**This fall, however, our co-op is celebrating slow food:** “Individuals and groups the world over have reawakened to the values inherent in knowing where their food comes from. The Slow Food movement honors local food customs and celebrates the pleasures of the table.” Will you join co-op owner/members as we celebrate ?

### Simple things you can do to slow down.

- **Savor what you eat.** It takes your stomach 15 minutes to receive an “I’m full” message. If you eat too fast, studies show that you risk obesity by eating too much.

- **Eat at the table.** People who multitask, eating at the TV, or computer, [guilty!] actually eat more than those who focus only on their meal.

- **Cook together.** Children who participate in preparing meals tend to eat what’s served (including vegetables) and have healthier eating habits.

Let’s eschew fast food. **Slow food**, anyone?

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## Notable Quotables: regarding those who cannot chose between *better* and *more*

- **Locally—southeastern Minnesota.** A single parent with two children must earn \$17.69 per hour to meet minimal basic needs. 66% of available jobs pay less than \$17.69 per hour. 25% of available jobs pay less than \$9.27 per hour. — from a 2007 report *Jobs Now Coalition* [www.jobsnowcoalition.org](http://www.jobsnowcoalition.org)
- **Locally—our community.** The Northfield-area food shelf distributed over 305,000 lbs of food in 2006 to an average of 240 families each month. The Community Action Center supports three community gardens. - from the flyer, *Northfield CROP Hunger Walk*, sponsored by 12 churches, 4 agencies, 2 colleges, and 41 businesses.
- **Globally: access to income/water.** 1.1 billion people are forced to survive on less than \$1.00 per day: one out of every six people on earth. The same number lacks access to safe water.
- **Hunger/education.** 2.8 billion live on less than \$2.00 per day--about 50%. Over 800 million [three times the population of the US] do not get enough food to live active lives. One child dies every five seconds from hunger-related causes: 16,000 per day. Over 12 million children and more than 35 million families in the US wonder when they will get their next meal. [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org) Over one million school-age children worldwide are not in school. Universal primary education would cost about \$10 billion per year—about what Americans spend on ice cream in a year.—*Making Poverty History*, Church World Service. +++

## Conglomerate vs local vs made in China: which foods are safer?

According to a Harris/Wall Street Journal poll, 95% of adults followed food safety announcements this year. An August 2007 Gallop poll showed that the majority avoided buying certain brands or types of food. MSNBC reported in July that 92% of US consumers preferred knowing which country produced the food they buy. Says Barth Anderson, in *MIX*, a publication of Twin Cities Natural Food Co-ops, “This nearly unanimous consensus is the direct result of Chinese shrimp, honey, toothpaste, peapods, catfish, plums, sea-

food, and pet food all surfacing in the US during the last year with serious safety problems.

Says Anderson, “The USDA and FDA offer more regulation than China, broadly speaking, but our food system is far more centralized—and that’s a red flag when looking at public health and food safety.” For example, ConAgra, perhaps the largest food manufacturer in the US, did an 18 million pound meat recall in 2002, a three million pound ready-to-eat-lunch recall in 2005, and a \$50 million peanut butter recall for salmonella this year. The Irish potato famine should

have taught us not to put all our eggs, meat, and peanut butter in one basket.

Charles Margulis, Center for Food Safety, believes that hope for the US food system rests with having more small, local producers. Often untraceable national and international food-borne illness outbreaks, linked to industrial, globalized production, could not, by definition, occur if our food system were based on local and regional production and distribution. A small farm in Minnesota couldn’t possibly sicken as many people as a large national conglomerate

could; just one of ConAgra’s Colorado meatpacking facilities, e.g., processes 354,000 lbs of meat daily.

“The more we move towards local systems,” Margulis said, “the less chance there is of such mass outbreaks.” Additionally, the bond between farmer and consumer creates loyalty—and safety. Chris Blanchard, owner of a local organic farm, understands the trust consumers place in him. “It’s in our hands to avoid any appearance of impropriety.” His very farming practices are always on display. That counts with us. +++

## LET'S TALK ABOUT COURAGE

*Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of a new Heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas  
Where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.  
We ask You to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push into the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love.*

*-attributed to Sir Francis Drake - 1577.*



If you read *ink spots* and *circle of influence* in one sitting, you may notice that certain themes repeat themselves. The poem above asks God to disturb us regarding the abundance of things we possess, and Bill McKibben challenges us to wonder whether our stuff is making us happier. Last quarter the theme for *circle of influence* was “enough.” You may want to meditate on the poem. It’s not scripture, but if the first English circumnavigator of the globe did indeed write it, it’s the literary part of his legacy that enhances his adventures at sea. In December 1577, Drake set off on his round-the-world voyage. He passed through the Straits of Magellan, up the coast of South America, and as far as the 48° north latitude along the North American coast, which he claimed in the name of Elizabeth I. He then sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, and back to England, arriving in October 1580, after nearly three years of “losing sight of land.” *Britannica* says “as the embodiment of Elizabethan maritime enterprise, he may be said to have founded the British naval tradition.”

But when I think of courage, I think of Ron Heagy. We have been privileged to hear him speak three times at AIM conventions. The day before his eighteenth birthday his plans for the future were profoundly disturbed. Because we want more people to hear *his* message of “strength, courage, hope and love,” we are inviting him to speak for our next *Optimal Health Seminar*. I usually use our newsletter to announce these events three or four times, so here is your first notice:

**What:** an informative, inspiring, two and half days on the beautiful campus of St Olaf College

**Where:** Northfield, Minnesota

**When:** 17-19 July 2008

**Who:** We are inviting alums of *Let's Be Well*, past *Optimal Health Seminar* participants, and AIM members within 300 miles of Northfield. If you are one of the latter, AIM has sent you a survey asking if we can count on you to participate. Your reply does not bind you to anything, but Ron Heagy is a high maintenance speaker, and we will need a reasonably firm commitment from MANY people to find our own courage to take on this project. If you have been part of one or more of the three categories above sometime since 1998, you know that we [Dick and Carol Cover, Angie and Jerry Olson] have hosted five Optimal Seminars, the 100 City Tour, and two Super Saturdays. **Please mark your 2008 calendar. Complete details will be forthcoming in the winter newsletter.**

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