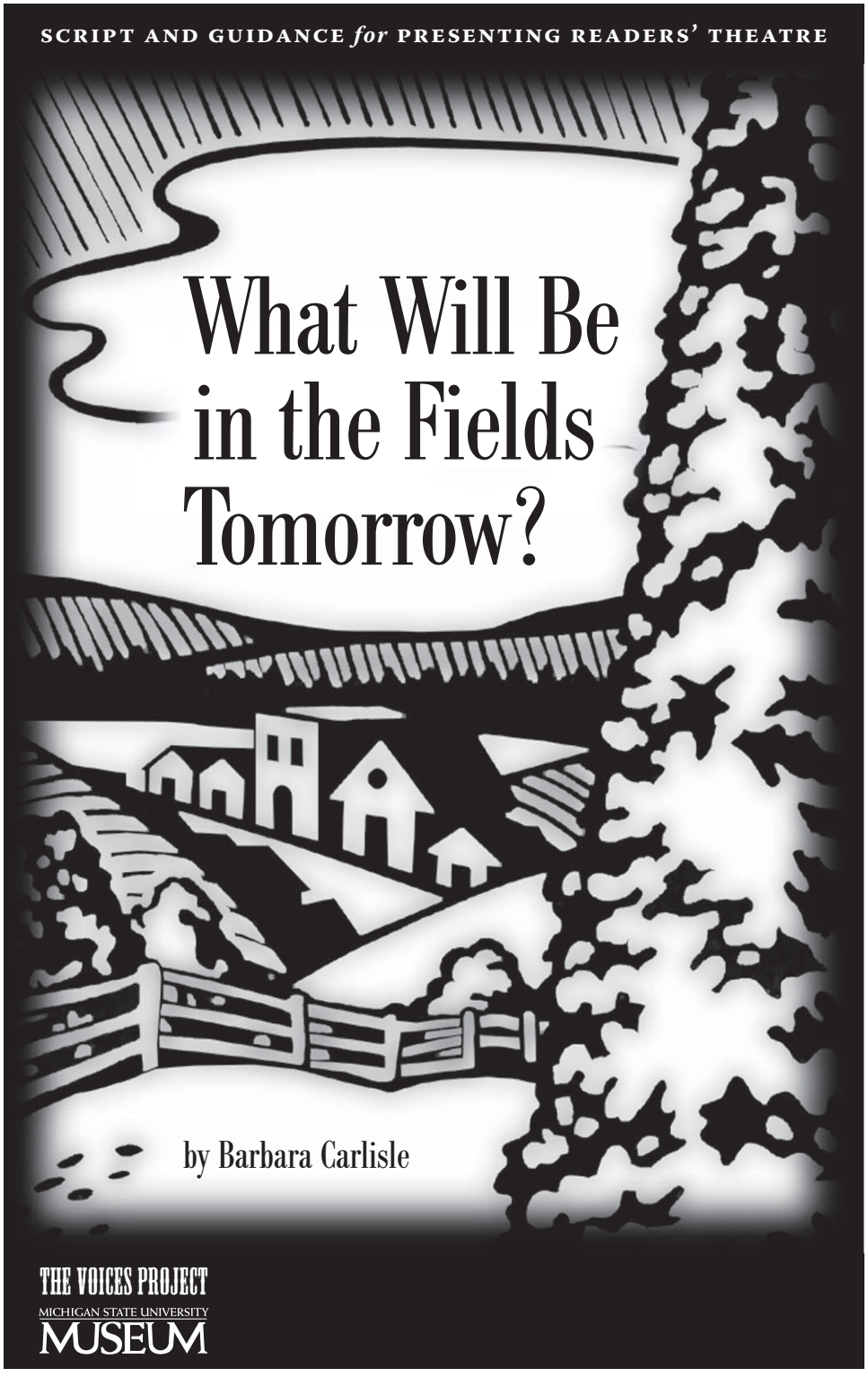
SCRIPT AND GUIDANCE *for* PRESENTING READERS' THEATRE



What Will Be in the Fields Tomorrow?

by Barbara Carlisle

THE VOICES PROJECT
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
MUSEUM

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The Power of Engagement

What you will find here is a sort of hybrid plant, yet not an exotic, or even a fragile one. It is a readers' theatre script intended as an opportunity for people to gather and make a piece of theatre among themselves, using themselves as performers and also as audience.

Until you experience it, it's hard to see how you can use it. Once you've experienced it, the power of engagement it creates will surprise and move you.

A SHARED EXPERIENCE ENGAGES

It's not necessary to be bold, or talented, or theatrical to use this script with a group of people. Anyone can read the words out loud, honestly. That is all that is demanded.

When the reading is finished, the community of readers and audience will be ready to discuss the issues, and will be animated to do so. It just works that way.

So, we invite you to try this out. A second essay provides some tips on how to maximize the experience, especially if you imagine an audience greater than the reading group itself.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

This type of script could be generated around any topic. The concern of The VOICES Project is sustainability and the future of agriculture.

We as a society seem to have turned a corner where genuine concerns about the environment, about health and the future of the planet are in the public consciousness. We see it in activism coming from the building industry, the energy industry, the auto industry and the food industry. It seems clear, if measured by the growing number of political statements, corporate proposals, foundation work, film and television documentaries, that the big environmental questions have reached a level of public concern people can no longer ignore. Our goal is to help the dialogue evolve within the public awareness of the agricultural world. We know that healthy, nutritious food, is a key to healthier children, a healthier population, lower health care costs. All this has its base in the agricultural community

A THOUGHTFUL DIALOGUE ON CRITICAL ISSUES

This script, its performance and discussion follow-up, is a tool for sparking thoughtful, engaged dialogue about issues of farming and food. There are elements here that speak to food production, food quality, sustainability of food producing land and people as well as a whole evocation of the lives of farmers—traditional farmers, alternative farmers, experimental farmers and a kid driving a big air-conditioned combine through acres of wheat.

Within these giant issues, the world of agriculture has its own multiple agendas.

The goal of this project is to build broader public awareness not so much of specific issues, but of the range of positions—ideological, economic, political, scientific, environmental, and historical, for example. On a personal basis the piece may suggest, even within the pressures of modern living, rethinking decisions about the food choices one makes. Perhaps discussions will lead to an interest in larger public policy, including attention to corporate policy, and even to the massive questions of feeding the world and sustaining the capacity to do so.

ORAL HISTORIES AND THE STORIES

What Will Be in the Fields Tomorrow? began its life in video interviews made by cinematographer Cynthia Vagnetti, talking with a whole range of alternative farmers. Most were in the mold of reducing chemicals in the soil, cutting down on waste runoff, restoring grasslands, keeping energy costs down, and some were adding organic certification, restoring old fruit varieties, experimental pasturing, furrow to finish hog raising, free range chickens, bartering, and the like. Their voices have been captured and distilled and grouped into sections like "A Farmer's Vacation." The words are their own—full of strong feelings about their lives and work.

To these voices have been added three pairs of characters whose dialogues through the play call into question a whole range of issues. One of a pair of life long friends is deciding what to do with her farm now that she is widowed and feeling her age. Her companion, who has farmed in a more traditional way argues with her about the options—and they trade sweet corn for some fryers. A pair of fifth graders show off to each other how much they learned about international trade and farming, while earn-

ing money weeding beans, and a college student, more keen on getting a date than doing his weeding lab assignment, is weighing his decision to get a degree in Ag Economics while the girl he has his eye on has become a zealot for the elimination of all chemicals from the ag world.

Two more monologues present stories drawn from actual events.

TAKING ON THE VOICES

The whole idea of this kind of work—of readers' theatre—is to invite people to take on these voices—just read them aloud either in a group for each other, or for an audience.

As a whole it makes a little play; but individually the monologues and dialogues and choral sections could be presented separately if the group wants a shorter time together. The group might be a Vocational Ag class, an Ag Extension sponsored event, a 4-H club meeting, a church circle, a continuing education class, a Civitan or Kiwanis meeting; a Chamber of Commerce or planning commission open meeting, where, perhaps a town is considering establishing a farmers market.

It is best to set such a performance for something that already has a meeting established. Putting on plays is easy. Getting people to come to them is very hard. Furthermore, the audiences familiarity with the readers is a big part of what engages people, first to listen, and then to participate in the discussion that follows.

The performance psychology works simply enough. The person reading is someone you know. They are not actors, and they are reading, so there is no danger that these are outsiders coming to teach you something. The audience and the performers may be one in the same, or there may be a larger group listening.

Whatever group gathers, the leadership should dive in and be part of the reading. That signals to everyone that the whole thing has legitimacy. This works best when people step out of the shadows, when people feel included. It also works best when you know there is controversy represented in the reading group and the audience. The more difference of opinion present, the better the event will play out.

DIALOGUE AND EXPLORATION BUILD AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY

It is our experience with this kind of theatre that ultimately it builds and strengthens communities. It is a "soft" way of introducing controversy. It allows positions to be stated in the voices of real people with recognizable lives, who are people you know yet people you don't know.

The ultimate key, of course is the follow-up conversation. Ask simple questions:

- What voices did you hear that you want to speak about?
- Where do you see the dilemmas?
- Does any of this discussion touch your life now?
- What stories surprised you?
- What positions seem closest to your own?

Consider making a list of things the group might want to take up if it were to go on. These might include:

- Learning more about where daily food comes from, how it gets to market.
- If there is a continuum from General Foods to the roadside fruit stand, what do you choose on that continuum and how do you make the choices?
- Where do cooks, restaurants and the food preparation industry fit in all this?
- What are the factors in feeding the world and sustaining the environment?
- And then, of course, if you were to collect your own food and garden and farm stories, what would you tell? Some groups may consider doing this.

What Will Be in the Fields Tomorrow? is not a magic solution to anything—but it has a magic to it.

We offer it with confidence and enthusiasm.

How to Make a Good Show

From the beginning, this project was imagined as a way to make the voices of farmers come alive and by doing this to stimulate discussion about the economic and ecological sustainability issues contemporary agriculture faces. Everything that is said in this piece has been expressed by someone interviewed by Cynthia Vagnetti. The choral segments are direct quotes. The dialogues and monologues are extensions of experiences, ideas, and concerns presented to this project from many different representatives of the agricultural community.

The piece was always imagined as performed with scripts in hand. The performers would be members of the audience community. Sometimes the performers would be their own audience.

This script relies on the authenticity of the speakers. To the audience they would be known persons, voicing concerns of actual people.

In that sense it is *not* a conventional play, where the actor hides behind the character and pretends to be someone else. Here the person speaking lends some credibility to the language because of who they are in their own community. At the same time he or she is taking on the persona of another person.

PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE

Very often people doing this performance will have the script only a short time before the actual presentation. It will be good if they have time to read the whole thing. It is more likely that they will take time to read their own parts. In any case they should:

- Highlight or underline their lines.
- Pay close attention to their cues—the lines that immediately precede theirs.
- Mark the pages where they come in some way—paper clips are helpful.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Except for the two monologues (the new ag worker and the person with the egg co-op) everyone works with others, either in pairs or in choral groups.

The key for everyone is to *listen actively*. In the choral sections, each speaker is contributing a different angle on a topic. It is critical to listen to each speaker, look at them, respond to them, so that when you speak you are contributing to the larger conversation of that topic.

In the dialogues each speaker plays off the other. Listen to what is said. Realize what your character must be thinking before you speak. What you say comes out of that thinking and feeling.

REHEARSAL

Get with your partner. The Choral Group should gather all together and work through the choral sections one by one. The pairs should get off by themselves and sit where they can look at one another while they go through their scenes. Go through them, out loud, beginning to end.

GUS & BIRDIE

Central to these two women is the fact that they have known each other for their whole lives. Their talk is full of shortcuts. They are way past making each other mad—or at least they can speak about things directly, and move on to the next topic without a lot of formality. Each has a sense of humor. Birdie's dilemma about the farm is a question that keeps the piece going. What will she do? The question allows us to explore a lot of issues. It doesn't give so many answers as it raises questions.

THE YOUNG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Here we get to meet a kid, a young man, who was raised on a big commercial farm and a girl who has idealistic notions about having a natural/organic farm . . . but mainly you have a little love story as he tries to impress her. Their dialogue raises some more questions about modern farming . . . and gives conventional farming a face. Their interest in each other drives the two scenes.

THE KIDS

They are driven by a competitive instinct that supercedes everything else. Their dialogue raises more issues of sustainable farming. The fun in them is letting the competitiveness gradually turn into a friendship. They both like being smart.

THE CHORAL VOICES

Each voice has several speeches. Some of them come from the same original speaker. Other times they are roughly connected by a point of view.

It is among the voices that we hear from African Amercian, Native American, and Hispanic American farmers. If the presenters have no representatives of these groups, these voice should simply be read by whoever is available, speaking honestly and directly, without any attempt to have an accent.

If there is a smaller or larger number of choral speakers than suggested by the script, the organizers should feel free to divide the voices differently.

Choral readers should ask themselves: What am I reacting to? What thoughts are going through my head? Who am I trying to convince? Why am I saying this now?

Many of the choral statements are musings—inner thoughts. Some are spoken out of frustration. Some feel they are simply stating the obvious. Think about each speech and each line within a speech, and figure what state of mind is behind it. Then adopt that state of mind.

Be ready to step right up when it is your turn to speak. Keep the flow going.

If the choral group is seated during other scenes, those speaking a particular section can rise and remain standing after they have spoken, and then all sit down together. They can stand one at a time, or stand around a mike together. The key factor is to minimize the time between speakers and to eliminate waiting for people to be seated when they are done or lots of shuffling around to get together to start. The choral sections are created as a sort of dialogue among voices. There should be an energy of statement and response—sometimes in agreement, sometimes giving a different aspect to something, sometimes challenging. Whatever it is, the feeling of response should be there.

MONOLOGUES

The New Ag Worker and the Egg Co-op Farmer have longer stories to tell. The New Ag Worker is obviously very nervous about a meeting he/she has to run. The fear is only partly real and the character has a sense of humor about it. The character is trying to talk themself into handling the moment—and in the process raises a number of questions about modern farming. This character usually gets laughs—and members of the cast can laugh too as they listen.

The egg co-op story is a big success story for modern alternative farmers. It is certainly told with a smile and a sense of disbelief that it could have turned out so well. It also speaks of many issues of scale and sustainability.

In rehearsal the two monologue givers might read their monologues to each other as a way of trying them out.

Before the performance, everyone should rehearse everything out loud with their various partners. This is essential to get the bugs out. It is not enough to have read it silently to oneself. It is very different to speak it out loud with someone listening.

These can be done simultaneously—the choral group working, the pairs working, the monologues working—*but everyone must speak anything out loud that he or she is going to speak in performance.*

A SONG AS AN ENDING

If you use the song at the ending remember to rehearse the smooth starting of the song, and rehearse the song. Stand and bow at the end of the song. Follow the lead person off-stage. If you do not use the song, simply close with the final Choral piece. When it is finished, everyone stand, and on the cue of the leader, take a bow. The audience will know this is the cue that it is over, and will applaud.

A SMALL-GROUP EXPERIENCE

In a small-group experience, performers and audience are the same group. If your performance is very small scale—that is, if the group who is reading is its own audience, you can still note the suggestions above. You will want your group as an audience to follow the action, to hear what is said, to be engaged, to care about the speakers and not get distracted by turning pages. *But,*

skip the full rehearsal step. You can warm everyone up by doing a simultaneous reading of everyone's first speech. But it will be counter productive to rehearse everything, because for a small self contained group, part of the fun will be the discovery of what the piece is. It will be fun to find out what is happening to your character as you read the piece. The discussion that follows will be informed by your experience both as audience and as performers. The mistakes or missteps you make along the way will just add to the mix.

REMEMBER: THIS IS THEATRE

That means its essential nature is an interaction between audience and performer. Whatever happens is part of the show. It can't be erased. *Enjoy it!*

FINALLY

Find a way to give credit to the creators and disseminators of the piece. Many people have contributed to the existence of this script. Include their names in a program, or read them out in your introduction. From the collection of the original interviews, to the editor and creator of the dialogues, to the many people who tested or tried out the script, to the management of the printing and production of the actual scripts, dozens of people have been involved. It is important that the audience know that such projects require a lot of people and resources—even when the medium appears to be clean and simple.

Sharpening the Performance

■ Everyone practice turning pages quietly and unobtrusively, getting the page ready before you need to speak. The audience can be very distracted by a lot of page turning.

■ Everyone practice looking at the speaker—whether your scene is on or not. Audience members will scan your faces. If you are looking out the window, they will look out the window. Simply watch whatever scene is going on.

■ Everyone practice speaking out loud, pronouncing all your consonants. Just for fun, all together, everyone speaking at once, say the first sentence of your character out loud, slowly, as if you were trying to be understood by someone who is slightly deaf, and may not understand English all that well.

■ Think how this careful speaking feels, and generally slow down your speaking and enunciate clearly. Put endings on all your words. It doesn't take much, but it will make an enormous difference in how well the audience understands you.

■ Laugh at funny things the other characters say. If you are inclined to say, "Oh," or "My," or "Wow" at someone's story—especially in the choral sections, don't hesitate to vocalize your reaction. *Stay in the moment.* That is what theatre people say. Be a part of what is going on inside the play. The exception to this

is the dialogues. They are little worlds of their own and we can't enter them, just watch them happen—and, maybe, smile.

■ *Rehearse your entrance and exit*. Choose someone to lead the group on and a plan to get to your seats quickly. Similarly, have someone lead the group in a bow, and someone lead the group off. Practice this. Smooth beginnings and endings make a huge difference.

■ *Set up the stage so the dialogues are seated together, and the choral group is seated together.* If you need to use mikes this may mean some moving around. Think this through and keep the movement down to as little as possible.

What Will Be in the Fields Tomorrow?

Exploring the Voices of Sustainable Agriculture

From *People Sustaining the Land,* with interviews and primary sources from the collection *Voices from the Fields* by Cynthia Vagnetti. Script created and edited with original material by Barbara Carlisle.

SETTING

The setting is nothing more than some chairs and a kitchen table. The choral groups should be separated in some way from the dialogue set-ups.

PERFORMERS

All performers read from the script as a convention of the performance. They are speaking the voices of real people. Choral voices change persona from segment to segment—though there may be some consistency in their outlook.

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CHORAL OPENING

The Spiritual Life of a Farmer

CHORAL A: Things come and go, and things live and things die. This natural world is going to endure long after I'm gone, and it was happening long before I got here. I am not in control here and I can't be in control, and if I let go, the divine can come and speak through me, give me guidance. You've really gotta be quiet and see what the truth is. You've really got to listen.

CHORAL B: The wine is liquid sunshine. The wine is the light; it's the energy that went in to creating the grapes. It's the energy that goes into harvesting. It's the energy and the light that goes into producing the wine. It's the celebration of the wine. It's all of that.

C**HORAL C:** I want to answer the hunger that people have to make a connection with the land and the seasons and the sun. Modern society does everything to disconnect us. I can give people this small glimpse of the seasons and the earth where they live. It's not the ideal. It just gives people a touch with what they need.

CHORAL D: I walk these roads and these fields and this pasture and the woods. I have prayed over this land. When we went through financial problems and health problems, I walked

in these fields and prayed for hours, up and down the rows. It has been my praying ground. I'm thankful for it.

CHORAL E: I feel that the land listens to me, that it understands me. I walk around talking to the plants. When I am angry, when I am happy, I'm talking, even if I'm alone on the land. I think that there is great spiritual capacity here on this farm . . . any things awaken inside of you.

CHORAL F: This soil, this is like life for me. Everywhere I go I grab some soil, just to feel the texture. I guess this is God's gift, this soil. You've got to take good care of it. It's a spiritual connection. Soil is life.

CHORAL D: I feel for the land. When I see it being polluted and destroyed, I get a rage in me somewhere besides my mind. It's more in my heart, in my soul.

EPISODE 1

Bertie's Farm: Bertie & Gussie

GUSSIE: So what is happening with Gail?

BERTIE: I'll miss her.

GUSSIE: Once they go away to college you never see them back on the farm.

BERTIE: That's not so. Look at Louise. And Nancy's girl, Eileen. They went off to school, and they came back to farming.

GUSSIE: They don't make enough to feed a sparrow. They've got other jobs. Or husbands with other jobs.

BERTIE: I think Gail will come back. She's worked for me since she was ten. Sort of grew up with the chores. I gave her her own cow to milk and she came in every morning before school, and after supper. She was driving the tractor before she was fifteen. I paid her a nice wage, but I think she just loved this kind of farming. She'll come back.

GUSSIE: You still composting all that manure? I don't know why you don't just buy fertilizer like everybody else.

BERTIE: Gussie, we don't need to discuss this. You and I don't see eye to eye.

GUSSIE: You're the one tryin to find someone to take the farm. If you weren't so fussy with organic and sustainable and all that malarky you could sell it in a minute and live off the proceeds.

BERTIE: I can't imagine not farming—not checking my birds. Not having my own fresh eggs.

GUSSIE: You remember moving chickens?

BERTIE: Sure I do.

GUSSIE: When I was real little I got one chicken in each hand, and then I got bigger I could carry two. It was quite a ways from the building where we started them to where they would go to be butchered. The older you got, the more you carried.

BERTIE: My mother would always get me for a serious talk when we had some job to do together. You're stuck in an 8-foot-by-10-foot building with a scoop shovel, you can't get away. She'd tell me about her life when she was a girl. I hated it then, but now she's gone, I realize what she was passing on to me.

GUSSIE: I miss my kids.

BERTIE: At least you had some.

GUSSIE: You thinking about passing this on to your nieces and nephews?

BERTIE: I'm not to that yet.

GUSSIE: You got to make some plans.

BERTIE: I only turn seventy-five next month and I've got my health. Don't be sending me to the undertaker.

GUSSIE: I'm just saying you ought to be making some plans.

BERTIE: I want someone to carry on what's been developed here. The way we do the hogs and chickens, and the compost for the garden. And the work out on the grassy waterway to stop the erosion.

GUSSIE: When did you sell the cattle and sheep?

BERTIE: I don't know. Maybe ten years ago.

GUSSIE: I lose track.

BERTIE: We didn't want to hire any extra help.

GUSSIE: You took on Gail.

BERTIE: I guess I think of her as family. Though she isn't related.

GUSSIE: And your brother?

BERTIE: Mr. Fixit? I'm his retirement entertainment. If he didn't have something to fix he'd break something just to keep busy.

GUSSIE: Bertie. You're a widow. You're getting too old for all this work. You might as well admit it.

BERTIE: Don't you push me on this, Gus. I know my mind. This farm has got organic corn and it took three years to get certified. We're not putting any chemicals into the soil or the water. We've gotten rid of the antibiotics. We've got a farrow to finish hog operation and we've got customers who want this quality meat. There's even people who bring their children to see how the hogs and chickens are raised, so these city kids get some understanding of where food comes from—not just sliced up in a plastic tray in the supermarket.

GUSSIE: I know this sermon by heart, Bertie. Don't preach at me.

BERTIE: If you know how I feel, you know why I have to think through what I do with this farm. I've got people counting on me. I sell organic feed to dairies who sell organic milk. I'm part of something that's helping people be healthier and safer.

GUSSIE: You act like Jim and I are poisoning the world. We drink the water out of our own wells, you know. We are taking care of what we have. We've had to go at farming differently is all.

BERTIE: I'm just telling you I'm not ready to quit.

GUSSIE: You're seventy-five years old and you've lost your husband, and your arthritis is starting to act up. Don't tell me I can't see that. I've known you for sixty years, Bertie. You're stubborn as a horse.

BERTIE: How many ears of corn do you want? The Silver Queen is coming in real nice this year.

GUSSIE: I'd be grateful for a dozen. We have the grandkids over for supper. I've brought you a quart of raspberries. I'm glad they're finished. What with fighting the birds for them and getting scarred all over from picking.

BERTIE: I hate wearing gloves.

GUSSIE: Can't be bothered.

BERTIE: Give my love to Joshua and little Jimmy.

GUSSIE: Remember what I said.

BERTIE: Are you gonna let me forget?

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Voices of Sustainability I

CHORAL G: The history of what's happened in agriculture is something I never understood until I attended the Land Stewardship Project. And I think we've lost that in our local story—we've lost our roots, we've lost our connection to what's important. I mean there isn't anything more important than land and water. And how we built our society on the politics of land and water. I think it's a story that's kept kind of quiet. So to me sustainable agriculture is about understanding the whole history of agriculture and what we have to do to preserve our resources.

CHORAL E: We're quite isolated here, so we tend to get the dregs when it comes to food. We're kind of at the end of the delivery chain, and I think poor food has cost many people their health. So this Project Fresh Michigan is great. They have a class for pregnant women and young mothers, and they give them coupons for local foods, and then we have

a farmers' market set up right outside the class, so people who don't have much transportation can get to it. It gives people a little money that they probably wouldn't ever have spent on good food they didn't even know was available. And that's one thing I think sustainable agriculture is about. Getting a community its own good food.

CHORAL B: We were looking at high costs like the fuel and electric bill. If we got the cattle out there grazing the land we won't be running the silo motor; we won't be using electricity to run the feed pump, we won't be using the fuels to run the tractors to harvest the feeds. We do the field rotation for the grasses to grow back. The fencing systems are much better than they had years ago so it worked out really well—everything came up so much better. . . . We got our bills down by changing how we worked with our animals.

CHORAL D: Conventional agriculture means to me, people growing commodities for money. Of course, making a living at farming is really important. We all need to make a living, but, I would say an alternative system, it's like, working the natural system. It's like working with nature, and it seems like a conventional system is working against it, because there always needs to be more—more technology and more science, more money . . . you know, really pushing, pushing, pushing the natural system instead of working within it and knowing its limitations. It's compelling . . . the science, . . . and anything that compelling, there's going to be money flowing into that research. Not like working with trying to understand, you know, the miracle of nature.

CHORAL C: I say conventional agriculture is the white man's way of controlling nature. Everything has to be in squares, in

> straight lines, . . . like if something gets in your way, instead of trying to work with it, you kill it, right now. You spray it and kill it. Because you can't draw that straight line with that hunk of dirt there. Diversity, that's the natural thing . . . the freedom to express your art. I don't know how else to put it. The different colors and different animals and the movement through the seasons is just a wonder. For me it's, well . . . about the middle of November and some years, of course, go better than others, but to me it's the feeling to look back on your season and say, well, it wasn't perfect, but gee, look what we got done.

EPISODE 2

A Field of Beans: Leonard & Alicia

LEONARD: Those are college students, over there.

ALICIA: I know that.

LEONARD: They're here on a field trip—weeding, just like us. But they don't get paid.

ALICIA: I know that.

LEONARD: They're studying agricultural science.

ALICIA: I know.

LEONARD: Mrs. Alberta hires lots of kids for jobs. Next year I'm gonna mow her grass.

ALICIA: Sure.

LEONARD: I am. I'm big enough to drive the big lawn tractor.

ALICIA: O.K.

LEONARD: Mrs. Alberta hates to mow her lawn. I heard her say so. Now she has her brother to do it, but I talked to him and he said next year I could if I gain ten pounds.

ALICIA: Ten pounds?

LEONARD: So I'm heavy enough so the automatic cut off doesn't kick in. If you don't have enough weight on the seat, the tractor thinks someone has fallen off and it stops. Now I use a brick to sit on, but if I gain ten pounds I can do it without the brick, and then I can mow the grass.

ALICIA: Good

LEONARD: They feed the grass to the animals.

ALICIA: Not the lawn.

LEONARD: No, not the lawn. The grass in the fields.

ALICIA: You're not big enough to mow that.

LEONARD: I didn't say I was.

ALICIA: You said . . .

LEONARD: I said I could mow

ALICIA: The grass.

LEONARD: The lawn. I said I could mow the lawn.

ALICIA: O.K.

LEONARD: O.K.

ALICIA: What time is it?

LEONARD: 3:30.

ALICIA: I can't be late for my piano lesson.

LEONARD: She said to walk six rows before dinner.

ALICIA: It takes 30 minutes to do a row.

LEONARD: It takes 20 minutes.

ALICIA: Not today.

LEONARD: I timed it the last time. It takes twenty minutes to weed each row.

ALICIA: It rained last night.

LEONARD: So?

ALICIA: So look at how many more weeds have popped up.

LEONARD: Oh.

ALICIA: So it will take 30 minutes.

LEONARD: So that is three hours.

ALICIA: I know. I did the math.

LEONARD: Alicia.

ALICIA: I don't want to be late for my piano lesson.

LEONARD: Alicia.

ALICIA: What?

LEONARD: Did you know that Mrs. Alberta has 12 different fields of grasses?

ALICIA: No I didn't know that.

LEONARD: Good.

ALICIA: Leonard?

LEONARD: What?

ALICIA: Did you know that Mrs. Albert is studying native grasses and saving the seeds?

LEONARD: No, I didn't know that.

ALICIA: Good.

LEONARD: Alicia.

ALICIA: Leonard.

LEONARD: I'm glad we're working together. You're very smart.

ALICIA: I know.

LEONARD: I mean. I am glad that of all the sixth graders she could have picked, I'm glad she picked you and me.

ALICIA: Thank you, Leonard. I'm glad she picked you.

LEONARD: Do you like walking beans?

ALICIA: It's OK.

LEONARD: I like it, because we aren't adding any chemicals to the soil.

ALICIA: I know.

LEONARD: Some say weeds are just a plant out of place.

ALICIA: I want to be an agronomist.

LEONARD: Really?

ALICIA: That's a scientist that studies the life of the soil at a microscopic level.

LEONARD: I know.

ALICIA: No you didn't.

LEONARD: But I could have figured it out.

ALICIA: O.K.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Work

CHORAL C: Some of my friends wanted their children knowing what hard work was . . . So when we had jobs here, we hired them . . . we paid them way too much, I suppose. It didn't matter how old they were as long they could do what they could for their age level, and respect our rules. Some of them were kind of hard to get to- so you got docked 50 cents for the day if you teased your sister or threw dirt or did something like that. That worked until those kids got old enough so they could work in town in air conditioning. They learned some good work ethics out here and they all love us, but they also love their air-conditioned jobs.

CHORAL B: I always used to say money is just an idea, but when you have the material, it's a real thing. And I always used to say—we can do all of these things without money because if we just eliminated the money, the labor would still be there; the materials would still be there. It's the creativity. It's the idea—At the vineyard we actually have shirts that say "Will Work for Wine" and that's literal. We wrote out IOUs—you help me make this wine and we'll give you some when we're all done.

CHORAL A: We have a potato digger that we call the "15 chicken potato digger." We traded it for 15 chickens. We have a friend who has just been so helpful and won't take any money—so we make sure that his freezer always has chickens in it. To barter I have to understand what your needs are, and what your motivations are in order for barter to work. . . . Money takes everything to a common denominator where we don't have to connect. Barter means we have to connect, to really be a neighbor. We have to open up and say, you know, I really could use this or that, or this is what I have to offer . . .

CHORAL D: Over the years we've helped a few people get off welfare and we've helped people in between jobs. There's always something to be done on the farm so an extra hand or two can make the load a little lighter and helps them through their crisis. My grandparents used to talk about how all through the depression they would bring people in that just wanted to work for food and shelter for the night. It's just one of those things that I feel like I may not be doing that much, but I am doing a part in getting someone else back on their feet.

CHORAL G: The first year we hired migrant workers we had to go through a crew leader. They mostly speak Spanish and I don't. We thought $8 an hour was a fair wage and that's what we settled on. So, there was one person that wasn't pulling the weeds quite right so I went over to her and I explained I'm paying $8 an hour and I showed her how I wanted it done . . . and that whole field just stopped instantly and it was a buzz of them talking to each other. I thought it was about pulling the weeds. But what I realized was that the crew leader was taking $3 of their pay. They were getting $5 an hour. Maybe some folks—$5 is all they pay, but not me. So I figured out how I could hire them directly. If this is how they make a living, I want to know that I'm paying them fairly.

CHORAL F: Computers and e-mail! That changes the work for the independent farmer. I can post notices to my regular customers. I can take orders. I can keep my books. We can check weather hour by hour. And price comparisons. It's all on the Internet. You just can't do it all by phone. You ask anyone who's in direct marketing. I couldn't do this work without my computer.

CHORAL C: A lot of people don't realize that when you work and you have your farm, you still have your work load when you come home. Sometimes that creates kind of a conflict of interest, I guess you could say. I call it *farmer's guilt*—when you're at work, and you're worrying about what you should be doing at home instead of what you're doing at the job. It's real—Farmers' guilt.

EPISODE 3

Jennifer & Jeff

JENNIFER: The first time I came out here it was for a general lab course. You know, taxonomy, evolution. We worked on Mrs. Alberta's field grasses study.

JEFF: I did that too. She's the Big Mama of field grasses.

JENNIFER: It's like sort of mantra with her.

JEFF: My Dad would hate her.

JENNIFER: How can you say that?

JEFF: He would. He's a Monsanto Poster Boy. Per acre production. Genetic modification. Exporting to China and the Middle East. Oil for Food. That's my Dad.

JENNIFER: Farming skipped a generation in our family.

JEFF: You think it's a genetic thing?

JENNIFER: My Grandma farmed. I went there a lot on summer vacations.

JEFF: You went to a farm for a vacation?

JENNIFER: She had a garden for produce and I helped her pick and freeze and can. And I helped my granddad bring in the sheep for dipping. I even went in the winter for lambing a couple of times.

JEFF: I would rather have gone to the dentist.

JENNIFER: So would my Dad.

JEFF: So you like this?

JENNIFER: Don't you? . . . Look out. You're stepping on a bean vine.

JEFF: Sorry. I don't know. I want to like something.

JENNIFER: Why are you doing this project?

JEFF: I'm in Ag Econ . . . So my Dad won't pull my tuition money.

JENNIFER: But your heart's not in it.

JEFF: I wish my heart was in something.

JENNIFER: International commodities?

JEFF: Something.

JENNIFER: Last week we had a lecture on the research on unexpected consequences of genetically engineered plants. Some have toxins that don't break down in the soil. It could

affect the population of soil microorganisms; and that's probably pretty important.

JEFF: I guess. . . . Ouch! They didn't say there would be thorns.

JENNIFER: That's a thistle. Thistles have spines. Roses have thorns.

JEFF: Give me a break.

JENNIFER: And then there are certain cross contamination issues with weeds. The plants that cross-pollinate like canola and corn in particular can pollinate wild relatives that are near by. In Canada there's been a problem with RoundUp-resistant weeds—Weeds in the ditch now also have the ability to resist the weed killer.

JEFF: I'm jealous.

JENNIFER: Of RoundUp?

JEFF: Of your passion.

JENNIFER: This is the future of the planet, you know. You don't care about any of these things?

JEFF: I don't know what to care about.

JENNIFER: Are you glad to be out here on this farm? . . . You can pull that. It's a weed and it has no spines.

JEFF: You're asking me if I am glad to be pulling thistles and watching beans grow?

JENNIFER: Yes.

JEFF: I'd rather be riding around on a big tractor/combine with the stereo cranked up and the AC ice cold.

JENNIFER: What's coming out the other end?

JEFF: That's gross.

JENNIFER: I mean, out of the combine?

JEFF: Wheat. Tons of wheat. Mountains of wheat. Silos full of wheat. Wheat for the universe to make my Daddy rich.

JENNIFER: I want so bad to find a farm. A small farm, and learn to work it. You know, be a real sustainable grower. I'd give anything to have a Dad who's a farmer.

JEFF: I'm jealous.

JENNIFER: You said that.

JEFF: Because I am. I'm a big pile of mush inside. I love that wheat, and I hate that wheat. I don't know what I want to do, or what I want to care about, or where I want to be, or what I want to do in the next twenty minutes.

JENNIFER: You don't have to know—except that the bus leaves at 5:00 and this row has to be weed-free.

JEFF: But you know.

JENNIFER: And you don't. So what.

JEFF: Really?

JENNIFER: Really what?

JEFF: You could be comfortable with someone with a maturity level somewhere around fourteen?

JENNIFER: As long as he knows he's fourteen, and maybe he's working on it.

JEFF: I am working on liking this sustainable ag thing.

JENNIFER: I don't believe you.

JEFF: Because I'm a lousy actor?

JENNIFER: No, because it's a lousy pick up line.

JEFF: Oh.

JENNIFER: Let me ask you one thing.

JEFF: Only one.

JENNIFER: OK.

JEFF: This is scary.

JENNIFER: Between hating your father—which is very cliché, by the way—and loving big machines and tons of wheat, is there a space for just looking at what's in front of you and opening up into uncomfortable territory?

JEFF: I think there is no answer here but yes, of course.

JENNIFER: Can I trust you?

JEFF: You said you were only going to ask me one thing.

MONOLOGUE

Ag Worker

Okay. I'm ready. I think I'm ready. I have the pamphlets. I have my cards. I have my list of everyone who's supposed to be here. I have my stomach pills. Oh, please, just don't let them eat me.

No. I know they're not going to eat me. But you have to understand. These people don't always like people from the government, and as of two weeks ago, I'm from the government. I just know some of them think federal farm programs are a communist conspiracy. Or a mega-corporate multinational takeover. Either way. You can't say certain names like "Cargill," or "Monsanto" here or someone will think you're against bio-diversity, and you want to destroy the small farmer.

So I have to be calm. I just have to be calm.

You know what makes me crazy? Acronyms. I made a list I've heard just this week. CPAs, of course. USDA—well, that's me.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. NRCS, GMOs, CSP, PSL, LSP, SARE—that's the meeting tonight Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education—ANR, AFLT. People just say these letters like they were real words and everybody but me seems to know what they're talking about. I smile and listen and hope the actual name will come up so I don't have to look unbearably stupid.

I am not stupid. And I'm not all that green. Well, I guess I am. But I grew up on a farm. I've milked goats and artificially inseminated cattle—which you don't want to know about if you're not a farmer—and I can calculate per acre production, and I know cover crops and crop cycles, and even some really good ways to manage gardens without pesticides. I've put up hoop sheds and I've shoveled enough pig shit—excuse me—manure—to fill the Silverdome. I did my thesis on microorganisms in soil. I interned on a farm that was in a tree program and I helped them create buffer strips that stopped their runoff. I can help. I really can. But I'm only 27 years old. Who believes a 27-year-old Ph.D. from the Department of Agriculture?

You know what my Mother told me? She told me to listen.

And she also said, "Most people want to do good. They want to do what's right." I have to believe her.

In grad school we heard a lot of different theories. We had profs who hated the word organic. They thought anyone who went in that direction was going to destroy the progress made in feeding people. They'd say hydroponic was the way of the future. They'd say getting the right, safe and effective chemical mix was the answer. They'd show us these miraculous things that were happening in genetically modified grains and grasses—that

could feed the world on one fiftieth of the land now devoted to farming. And they really wanted to do what's right.

And then we'd have these profs who were sure it was the hand of the devil coming to destroy us if we sprayed a weed. They had all this great research on natural predators for insects, grasslands ecology and the cycles of nutrients, and the benefits of rotation pasturing. Some of them don't even talk to the others.

I believe I can help. I mean, I have access to information. I can point them to studies. And techniques—and people who have experience. Programs with money for their projects. Banks that are sympathetic. Guidelines to pass all the inspections.

If they can get past the fact that I'm young, and I just got out of grad school.

Mother said to listen. Remember that. Listen. Don't be scared. They all want to do good. And Listen. Okay. Let them in.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Voices of Sustainability II

CHORAL A: I really didn't know much about apple growing and I didn't know much about organic farming. But I read the chemical bags that my uncle used, and I thought there

is just no way I can do this, you know. I'll die if I continue to use these chemicals. So I started learning about how apples grow and insect cycles. I really had to do a lot of digging, and trial and error, and some old time remedies. But having 30 different varieties—Winesaps, Jonathans, Spartans, McIntosh, Golden Delicious, Paula Reds, Ida Reds, and a lot of antiques. This mix is what makes my cider so good. Plus if something goes bad with one variety, I have all the others to rely on while I get on track. I figured this out slowly. Not a big epiphany. It was five years before I became certified organic. But I think it's all those varieties that is the key to what sustainable is. If you grow just one thing—and that goes bad—you don't have anything.

CHORAL C: I like to view the whole farmland as a teacher. A microcosm for understanding the place of the human being in the whole context of plants, animals, minerals, sun and stars. We have people come out and help harvest potatoes, and that changes their whole experience of potatoes. That's what a CSA can do. C. S. A. Community Supported Agriculture. You have shareholders. They pay to belong and then share in the harvest all season. We have 650 members. We have some serious cooks, and restaurant people, who just like cooking with local foods. One guy from New York came out. He said it caused him to get an apartment that had a better kitchen. He was taking these vegetables home and he wanted to enjoy them more.

CHORAL G: Basically we're trying to mimic a natural system. We look at our animals, their natural behaviors, and we handle them quietly instead of yelling and shouting . . . The mother pigs stay with the piglets until they decide to wean them. The chickens run in the pasture and run off all the

bugs and insects. Each helps our farm run smoothly. We try to have the rotations so we don't need to use herbicides. We want our animals to be healthy so we don't need to use antibiotics and hormones. We want to end up with a good tasting quality product. That's what we're striving for.

CHORAL E: On this farm we handle the crops without needing to use gloves. We don't need to cover our noses and mouths the way we did when we came here from Mexico. Now I work at the Rural Development Center in Salinas. I learned how to drive a tractor, how to maintain it, how to do crop rotation. I have learned what native plants attract insects that are beneficial. I use only natural fertilizers like chicken manure. We also use garlic, chili, and lemons against infestations. When I arrived in this country I didn't dream of this. My children were embarrassed to say that their mother worked in the field. Now they say: "My mother drives the tractor." That is good.

EPISODE 4

Bertie & Gus II

GUSSIE: You don't look so good.

BERTIE: That's a terrible thing to say.

GUSSIE: Well, you don't. You're thin as a reed. You don't take care of your skin in all that sun. Do you even take time to eat?

BERTIE: Gussie, do you remember when we bought cold cream at the Rexall downtown? Remember how we used to dress up and go to town on Saturday nights and drive up and down Main Street.

GUSSIE: Scoop the Loop.

BERTIE: It's how I met Raymond.

GUSSIE: He was from Ogden. I remember him in his Ford Pick up.

BERTIE: His father let him drive the truck after they cleared everything from the market.

GUSSIE: My father used to sit with the men at the diner, and my Mother would do her shopping.

BERTIE: Now there's not a store in town to go to. Just the big shopping centers.

GUSSIE: Bertie. I know what you're doing.

BERTIE: Changing the subject.

GUSSIE: Right. You can always get me reminiscing about the old days.

BERTIE: You remember how each farm used to have a small herd of cattle, and some pigs, and some chickens, and our own vegetable gardens. And we only needed a few things from town. My father would pay off the tractor parts when he sold the cattle.

GUSSIE: It was a lot simpler then, I suppose.

BERTIE: I think that was sustainable agriculture—at least partly. Everything we bought was in the community. I think it kept the community together. I think us small farmers—we still do. We buy parts for our old tractor from Gordon in town. Our money stays here.

GUSSIE: Oh Bertie. You're such a romantic. You don't believe in progress.

BERTIE: I believe in a different kind of progress other than just getting bigger.

GUSSIE: Bertie. We've had to get every penny out of that farm. We had three kids to send to college. Every inch had to produce. Every inch. We had to grow crops we could sell. I don't see why you don't understand that.

BERTIE: In the old days we didn't mow so near the fence rows, and there were places for the foxes and rabbits.

GUSSIE: And we nearly poisoned the lake with the run off from the old outhouses. Don't you talk to me about the good old days. Sick animals, and half the corn going to blight.

BERTIE: True. You get earworm in the sweet corn. You can't give it away. I heard they have corn with a modified gene that prevents earworm. Can you believe it?

GUSSIE: I can't believe you're talking about genetically modified corn!

BERTIE: Me either. Must be losing my grip.

GUSSIE: Bertie. Stop this. I want to talk about you. What are you gonna do?

BERTIE: My nephew in Los Angeles wants to buy the farm.

GUSSIE: Los Angeles?

BERTIE: He's a very bright lawyer who makes a lot of money.

GUSSIE: He wants to steal it from you. You know what this farm is worth?

BERTIE: To a developer? I know that acre lots on the Elliot Farm are going for $20,000 each. Can you believe it? Who would stay in farming when you can get $20,000 an acre for doing nothing.

GUSSIE: Well, the developer put in some roads and stuff. I bet the Elliots didn't get that much.

BERTIE: I want this to still be a farm. I don't mind all the vegetables from California or Latin America—but I think people should have the choice of buying locally. Just have the choice.

GUSSIE: You always wanted to save the world.

BERTIE: No. It was actually Raymond. He was the one who got me started with all this. I believed the Ortho Man. I was ready to invest in the big combine. It was Raymond. He remembered his father at the farmer's market, and he wanted us to make it all as simple and natural as we could. We had to try all sorts of things. We nearly went broke a few times.

GUSSIE: In the '80s. If we hadn't had all that soil in the land bank we'd have lost everything.

BERTIE: My folks had willed us the farm and it didn't have a mortgage.

GUSSIE: Don't I know. I heard my Jim say a thousand times: "We didn't get it for free like your friend Bertie." I didn't know if I hated you or what.

BERTIE: Raymond joined some groups and read and read. And then he got these connections with the college. They bring the students out. And do experiments.

GUSSIE: So he's the one that got you into all that nonsense.

BERTIE: And then he died. He up and died. I was so angry with him.

GUSSIE: Angry? Bertie!

BERTIE: You know what I mean. He left me just when things were going so well. When we could celebrate a little. Maybe even take a little vacation.

GUSSIE: Farmers don't take vacations.

BERTIE: So I can't let my nephew have it. I know everyone thinks I'm crazy. But you and me—we're the last farmers out here.

GUSSIE: Jim would sell in a minute.

BERTIE: I don't believe it.

GUSSIE: No. You're right. I might. But not Jim. Farming is in his blood, just like Raymond. He'd probably hold off your nephew with a shotgun.

BERTIE: Maybe I should give it to the college. Or the 4-H.

GUSSIE: Have you talked to Gail?

BERTIE: Not yet. But she's my big hope.

GUSSIE: Your brother will have a fit.

BERTIE: He won't be the only one.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

A Farmer's Vacation

CHORAL D: If we're out getting the cattle for the evening milking and we're just looking around, sometimes we'll find a nest of eggs or chicks or see an eagle soaring in the air. That's a farmer's vacation. You just take the time to enjoy God's gifts that he gave us. Having a snowball fight or building a snowman. After an ice storm, we're out picking up the branches and we'll have a wiener roast at the end. We put in a swimming pool here on the farm. So maybe we'll bale hay and get hot and sweaty and we'll swim and have a nice cold watermelon and sit out on our lovely front yard and just enjoy the air.

CHORAL E: My son—after he moved away and went to college—he teased me that he didn't realize what this thing called "a vacation" was. We took day trips. But not like other kids who go through several states and tour different national monuments. We just never did that. I don't think he really felt a loss or anything. He was just giving us a hard time. I don't think my son actually missed a vacation, but it's true, he'd never had one.

CHORAL F: It could be a sunrise; sometimes it's a sunset, sometimes it's a quiet rain, sometimes it's a sunny day with puffy clouds. When the orioles come back year after year or a woodpecker or a humming bird . . . and they make this glorious orchestra out there in the yard that we get to listen to. It's hard to ever lock one thing down. I may not make

a large income, but that sunset that I get to experience… I may as well be a millionaire.

CHORAL B: Well, some of what a lot people consider work is what we like to do. We do take breaks and goof around a little bit, or stop and go for a walk in the woods, or sit down and have a cold beer and enjoy the sunset at the end of the day. Every once in awhile we will go down to Lake Huron and sit at the beach or just take a ride down to the river and let the dogs go for a swim. A lot of times our breaks are really short, but then again, not many people get to work at what they really like to do. We're just lucky to be able to spend as much time together as we do. So, I guess, our daily life is really a combination of working and play all kind of balled up into one.

EPISODE 5

Jennifer & Jeff II

JENNIFER: (*reading aloud*) "About 15 percent of U.S. energy goes to supplying Americans with food, split between the production, food processing and packaging. Cornell University has estimated that if all humanity ate the way Americans eat, we would exhaust all known fossil fuels in just seven years."

JEFF: What are you reading?

JENNIFER: An article from *Solar Today*.

JEFF: What would you expect?

JENNIFER: (*reading*) "Pineapples are the most carbon intensive foods because they travel by air. They contribute 40 pounds of carbon dioxide per pound of pineapple."

JEFF: No more piña coladas.

JENNIFER: He comes out for eating locally.

JEFF: Even I can figure that out. No gasoline for transportation; no power for refrigerated trucks and train cars, no big processing plants . . . *and* two million people put out of work in the canning and hauling industries. International commodities trade grinds to a halt. Uprisings of farm producers all over the world. Massive famine . . . worldwide depression . . .

JENNIFER: He says in Portland, Oregon, there are fast food chains buying exclusively Oregon beef that is an all-natural product without hormones.

JEFF: You think what works in an upscale neighborhood in Portland, Oregon is gonna work everywhere? You think we're going to just wean people from year round fresh tomatoes on their hamburgers and processed catsup on their fries? You think we're going back to the local mill to buy flour instead of picking it off the shelf at Winn Dixie?

JENNIFER: I'm just reading this article.

JEFF: Look, the wheat my Dad sells makes Pop Tarts and cup cakes, and it gets bought by the ton, not by the five-pound bag.

JENNIFER: Well, I think that's what he's talking about.

JEFF: I know that's what he's talking about, and I'm saying we've got a world-wide distribution system because people *like* having pineapple in New Jersey. Look. When Average Mom and Dad get home wiped out by the two jobs they have to pay the rent, they don't have time to drive an hour into the country to pick up five pounds of kohlrabi or rutabaga, or whatever the farmer has going that week. They've got maybe twenty minutes to sweep through the store and put together something for dinner. And it might include pineapple. Or Mexican salsa—in a jar. Picked and processed a long way away.

JENNIFER: I think Ag Economics has gotten to you.

JEFF: Oh, come on. I watched my Dad all my life, sitting at his computer, trying to figure what his yield was going to be, what the price support was going to be, what was happening with Russian wheat, or South American grain—and watching the weather report sometimes five times a day so he'd get the harvest in before it would rot. You know, when you've got payments to make on a $150,000 combine, the bank doesn't care whether July was wet or not.

JENNIFER: You talked about your Daddy getting rich.

JEFF: I was trying to get your attention.

JENNIFER: It worked.

JEFF: And he had some very good years.

JENNIFER: And government programs.

JEFF: And the controls that go with them. There was no way he could afford to get out of wheat farming.

JENNIFER: What are you mad about?

JEFF: You—making me the villain.

JENNIFER: I just read the article . . .

JEFF: You talk about the small farmers saying they don't want the price supports because they don't want the controls. And I get that. But I say there's a lot more to it than that.

JENNIFER: Now who's passionate?

JEFF: OK. You win. I have feelings about all this. I do.

JENNIFER: Good.

JEFF: I'm not a bad person.

JENNIFER: No. I like you a lot. And I would not like a bad person.

JEFF: Really?

JENNIFER: Really.

JEFF: What else does the article say?

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Money Talk

CHORAL D: Quick money is what they want. On a farm you've got to wait months until you produce a crop to sell. You've got to wait on your money. You can't pick it up every Friday night. My grandkids? I don't know what they're going to do. They'll probably get out here and grow some cattle, to put money in their pocket and go buy a Cadillac—but to get out here and make a living on it, I don't believe they will ever do it.

CHORAL D: I remember one time when I was little, I was supposed to be helping my mother get eggs ready for market, and I thought it was fun to smash them in the yard and watch the cats go after them. And then my mother caught me—and of course she was mad—but then she cried. That was the grocery money. I was throwing away her grocery money. You don't forget that.

CHORAL C: Back in the '80s we were probably doing a cash flow every three to four days to see where the prices were on

things. I remember his dad being very upset with us because we sold all of our corn and we had 700 hogs to feed. He just couldn't understand that, but we needed the cash flow and when the corn prices went down we bought the corn back.

CHORAL G: It was the '80s when Mike's dad lost his farm. The land price went down to $500 an acre and even though he owed less than $600 they felt like they needed to get rid of the debt. We weren't able to buy any of that land because we weren't sound enough. In the '90s we were starting to recover, and that's also when we were just starting to learn about organics. I think now the banks actually see this as a value; being organic, so the risk isn't as great as it felt like years ago.

CHORAL G: I have a bookkeeping job that I'm able to do from my home, and an early Sunday morning paper route that brings extra income. They're good jobs because they don't interfere with the farm. You need money in the bank to pay the day-to-day living expenses. Insurance. Doctor bills. When you are small you get income at certain times of the year and you need to stretch that until the next group of hogs is ready to sell. Direct marketing helps. One fourth of our hogs go to a local butcher shop and are processed into packages. It's nice when I get an order for 40 pounds at a time—a restaurant, or a grocery—otherwise you're selling it pork chop by pork chop—just for the cash flow.

CHORAL E: I think it is difficult, even impossible for a woman who is single, has children, and is poor, to buy land. With no record of having a large and successful business, or even a small one, the banks are afraid to help you. The banks don't believe in people like us. But I read that 11,000 farms

in Michigan are Latino owned—and that's a lot of people who used to pick for a living. So it's still my dream for my children to continue what I started.

CHORAL D: If a young person today wants to get into farming, he just can't afford to get in it. If he had the kind of money that it takes to get into farming today, it would be better for him to take an investment on the stock market. Farming, I used to say, takes a weak mind and a strong back, but now it takes a strong mind and a weak back—because it's strictly dealing with the mind situation now. That's what I think about that.

MONOLOGUE

The Mr. Hiller Story

I have to tell you about Grazing Fields Eggs and Mr.Hiller. It's just such a wonderful story and if you hear it you'll know why I love this whole movement and why I just have to keep doing this. OK. I've got a lot of things going. Small grains—buckwheat—I love buckwheat pancakes—and the apple business. But this is about the eggs. I'm in this egg co-op that we call Grazing Fields Eggs. I'm in it with ten other farmers. We pack 3000 dozen eggs a week and 85 percent of the retail sale price goes right back to the farmer. We're real proud of that. It started because I had this Amish fellow who was processing my apple butter, and he

and some neighbors were interested in free grazing chickens for laying eggs. So I was going over to his place weekly to pick up a couple cases of eggs on my route to the food coops where I was marketing my apple products. That's how it started. Now we've got ten people and 3,000 dozen a week like I said, and a couple of Whole Foods, and some natural food stores, plus Hiller's. And that's as big as we want to get. With thirty-five retail customers it takes one whole day to grade and pack, and about nine hours on Tuesdays to deliver. That's enough. You've got to know when you're the right size. I think that's a key to sustainability, don't you?

But that's not the story. It's about Mr. Hiller. I had had some success in marketing to the food coops, and now we had this possibility of producing a lot more eggs, so I agreed to go to the Hiller group—Hiller's is a sort of upscale urban Detroit grocery—and see what could happen. So, I made my appointment with the buyer in Southfield. When I went in, I saw this much older guy kind of milling around the office, kind of looking into files, and I could immediately tell, you know, that he was just kind of looking busy. He was, I would say, eighty-five or so. I smiled when he looked my way, and I was a little curious, but I was also nervous about making my pitch for our eggs.

Anyway, it came my turn to meet with my buyer, and this old guy came in and sat down beside me in the office. So I told them about Graising Field Eggs, and the healthy chickens, and our small group, and the high quality eggs—you know—and I was finishing up and this older fellow said to the buyer, "You buy these eggs. These are good eggs. Look at this carton. Look at them. They're farm fresh. You buy these eggs." I just took a deep breath and smiled. What else could I do? I wanted to give him a big hug! Shoot. I wanted to give everyone there a big hug. And

as it turns out, that fellow, this older gentleman, was Mr. Hiller, who started the grocery store back probably fifty, fifty-five years ago. He just sold our eggs to the buyer.

That was a heartwarming moment. I liked it that Mr. Hiller was still there and his company was honoring him. I liked that they valued our kind of product. I liked my good luck in meeting him. It's been a good partnership.

Now that's a story of how this whole thing can work.

EPISODE 6

Leonard & Alicia

LEONARD: Who did you interview for your interview assignment?

ALICIA: Mrs. Alberta.

LEONARD: I was going to interview her.

ALICIA: You can, still. If you want.

LEONARD: I don't know.

ALICIA: You can. I did because I'm going to be an agronomist. But you still could.

LEONARD: I don't know.

ALICIA: You want to hear what she said?

LEONARD: OK

ALICIA: I made a tape and then I copied it down.

LEONARD: OK.

ALICIA: OK. Here's the main quote: "It's gotten to the point now where industrialization does not even have a country anymore. They grow it where they can produce it . . ."

LEONARD: What?

ALICIA: What do you mean?

LEONARD: They grow what? What is "it"?

ALICIA: Food. They grow food.

LEONARD: You have to say that.

ALICIA: OK.

LEONARD: OK.

ALICIA: ". . . They grow food where they can produce it the cheapest whether it's human costs, land costs, ecology. They

don't care as long as they can produce it the cheapest and bring it back to sell it for the most money."

LEONARD: Did you ever look at your T-shirt labels?

ALICIA: Leonard!

LEONARD: Did you?

ALICIA: No.

LEONARD: I did.

ALICIA: Why?

LEONARD: I was doing a report on globalization.

ALICIA: So what did you find out?

LEONARD: I checked three T-shirts. One was made in Guatemala. One was made in Honduras, and one was made in the Philippines. I didn't have a single one made in the U.S.

ALICIA: What's this one?

LEONARD: (*He looks at the tag on the back of her neck.*) Indonesia.

ALICIA: That's not agriculture.

LEONARD: Yes it is. It's cotton. It's not food, but it's agriculture. And manufacturing.

ALICIA: Leonard. I'm doing a report on Mrs. Alberta.

LEONARD: If I buy a T-shirt made in Honduras I don't know anything about the factory or even if it was made by child labor. So they can be very cheap because there aren't so many rules.

ALICIA: So if we get groceries from places we don't know anything about, we don't know how they were grown, or packaged, or any stuff like that.

LEONARD: Most grocery stores don't buy from the farmers right around them.

ALICIA: You think they don't care?

LEONARD: It's like the T-shirts. If you have the cheapest price, all the stores will buy from you.

ALICIA: (*Reading*) Listen: "The goal of industrial agriculture is to make as much money for the stockholders as possible. Eventually they have control of the market because they have the cheapest price."

LEONARD: I told you. Everyone likes cheap stuff. And everyone likes to make money. That's how globalization works. I did a whole report.

ALICIA: (*Reading more*) But Mrs. Alberta says: "It doesn't have any human dignity built into it. It does not have any of the biodiversity that we need. They don't have to care about ground water or insects or birds. I don't know which one of those things we can live without."

LEONARD: People don't care about that. They like cheap T shirts.

ALICIA: Not everybody.

LEONARD: What are you going to call your interview?

ALICIA: I could just call it Mrs. Alberta.

LEONARD: Is that your last quote?

ALICIA: No. I think this is. (*Reading*) "If we want to see a healthy landscape, we need to have regional control. We need to have food being produced regionally."

LEONARD: Regionalization

ALICIA: What?

LEONARD: That's your title.

ALICIA: Like globalization, only the opposite.

LEONARD: Do you like it?

ALICIA: I'm trying it out.

LEONARD: Good.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Voices of Sustainability III

CHORAL E: This is the Edible Schoolyard. It's about an acre of our school and there is a kitchen at the back. What happens comes out of the students, the land, the tools we've had, and the materials we've had at our disposal. Too many people have grown up in a world of colored plastic and TV. They don't even know what's fun. Kids don't come into contact with the elements, with sand and clay and water and sticks. It's really important for kids to peel bark, use a drill, weave willows, hammer a nail, slice a loaf of bread. That's where the poetry has got to come from. I don't really talk about sustainable practices. They come across it more by osmosis, by being around it and seeing it. The kids know that we don't use any chemicals. To me, at this stage, it's more important not to start a debate about McDonalds or conventional agriculture, but to hook the kids on the poetry of being in the garden.

CHORAL D: The average age of the African American farmer is his late fifties. I came back here to my Daddy's farm after college and the army. I'm the last of all the families that lived here when I was a boy. My dad started with 40 acres. I farm in the neighborhood of 2,500 acres—rice, soybeans and wheat.. I'm sustainable just for the fact that I'm here. I'm sustainable. If you're not sustainable, you'll be out because the whole thing is about making a profit. The farmer is not really out here to make a profit at all costs. Farmers are here to make a profit though. It takes a profit for any business to

stay in business. And in the process of being sustainable, you don't want to be sustainable at the risk of your neighbors, or at risk of damaging your environment, or damaging anything. You want to be sustainable and still be accountable, and that's the way I would put it.

EPISODE 7

Gussie & Bertie III

GUSSIE: You talked to her, didn't you.

BERTIE: You think you know so much.

GUSSIE: What did she say?

BERTIE: I don't have to go over all this with you.

GUSSIE: You got the worst hang dog expression I've ever seen.

BERTIE: Did you come over here to tell me that?

GUSSIE: Your brother came by.

BERTIE: Old busy body.

GUSSIE: He wants you to sell the farm to the developers.

BERTIE: He'd be out of work and then what would he do?

GUSSIE: He wanted me to persuade you to do it.

BERTIE: It would serve you all right if I left it to a motorcycle gang. They could ride up and down the hills and terrorize the neighborhood.

GUSSIE: You don't have to be spiteful.

BERTIE: Can't everyone mind their own business.

GUSSIE: You got any more fryers?

BERTIE: No, I sold them all to the Retirement Home. I won't butcher again until next week.

GUSSIE: Well, here's half of a rhubarb pie. Jim and I shouldn't eat a whole one by ourselves.

BERTIE: You make the best rhubarb pie in six states. I'll give you that.

GUSSIE: Thanks.

BERTIE: Gail just doesn't think she can commit to farming now. She says she doesn't know what she'll want to do in four years. She says it wouldn't be fair to me or her to decide now.

GUSSIE: It's a big world out there. She could end up in Africa or China or anywhere.

BERTIE: I know. I would like her to take it. But that's over. So give it a rest.

GUSSIE: You have your eye on any of those students that come out all the time?

BERTIE: Most of them have farms of their own waiting at home. Or they'll go work for Southern States, or John Deere. Make some real money.

GUSSIE: Some day they'll want to buy a house on a little farm and they're won't be any to buy.

BERTIE: Listen to you.

GUSSIE: You think I don't know what's going on? I'm not blind, Bertie. I'm not into this whole organic thing, but I know what's happening to farm land. Consolidated for big companies to run. Or turned into housing developments.

BERTIE: Then why do you want me to sell?

GUSSIE: Because you're my friend, and I want you to have a nice comfortable old age.

BERTIE: You want me in some gated community with some landscape decorator telling me what bushes I can have outside my front door?

GUSSIE: Stubborn as a horse.

BERTIE: I'm thinking about selling it to the Nature Conservancy. Or maybe some co-op, or something like that.

Maybe there's some young person out there just dying to get started . . . maybe they'll find me.

GUSSIE: Oh Lord, you're not going to one of those internet dating services!

BERTIE: Ha Ha, Gussie . . . But no . . . I think I could work out a plan. A trust, or a foundation that carries on what I've been doing. I keep the house and the garden. Maybe a piece of the orchard.

GUSSIE: You've already talked to somebody about this, haven't you.

BERTIE: It was Gail's idea.

GUSSIE: That girl. She probably still has her eye on this property.

BERTIE: Gussie. Stop fussing. I haven't decided.

GUSSIE: Thank goodness.

BERTIE: I'm only seventy-five and—

GUSSIE: —and you've got your health. I know, I know.

BERTIE: Aren't you glad for me?

GUSSIE: One day you will have to get this settled.

BERTIE: Maybe I'll give it to the Retirement Village and they can use it to give old people some good times out in the garden. Then I'll move in there myself.

GUSSIE: Ha ha yourself.

BERTIE: Thanks for the pie.

GUSSIE: Put me down for two fryers next week.

BERTIE: Wait, I'll get you some eggs.

EPILOGUE

A Final Chorus

CHORAL F: A farm producer is always trying to figure out how he can reduce costs because he doesn't think that he can increase the price.

CHORAL A: Society wants cheap food—but they also want everything to be pristine and perfect about the world they live in.

CHORAL D: If farmers have to pay their bills, they can't have insects wiping their crop out.

CHORAL B: I think most conventional farmers want a healthy place to live as much as anybody. I know where their hearts are and I know what they really want to happen on their farms.

CHORAL E: Look. If my daughter is raising pastured poultry and it costs $1.50 a pound, and Tyson can sell theirs for 99 cents—the consumer has to make a decision.

CHORAL G: And sometimes they have to go for bottom price because of their own situation.

CHORAL C: And you can't expect the 60-year-old man down the road to completely change his farming operation and stay alive.

CHORAL F: I hope that maybe the alternative agriculture that I'm a part of and conventional agriculture can both stay around.

CHORAL D: I hope that everyone—consumers and farmers and government and industry—will want to seek out what's good stewardship of the land and viable for the future.

CHORAL A: That could be real sustainability.

CHORAL B: That's what I hope.

ALL: Me, too.

Song

What will be in the fields tomorrow?
What will I see with my eyes?
Will I see the tall grass growing?
Will it be a compromise?

No they can't take my memory
Though they will try to steal my soul
I will die before I let them
I will cross another shore.

We can build a bridge together
We can build a bridge today
I will use my Father's hammer
And my Mother's voice to pray.

No, they can't take my memory
Though they will try to steal my soul
I will die before I let them
I will cross another shore.

—Words and music by Ed Snodderly, The Brother Boys
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THE END

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Sources

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THE VOICES PROJECT

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Julie Avery's work utilizes agricultural heritage to educate and inform the public about the past and contemporary agriculture and rural life issues. Dr. Avery has curated museum and traveling exhibitions, developed public programs, and produced a television documentary and two books focusing on agriculture and rural life and culture.

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A writer, producer, and director, Dr. Carlisle worked for 40 years building connections between the arts, education and communities. She has many years experience teaching and training writers for stage and screen. Her long-established work in community and regional theatre and her current work in video utilizes community voices speaking for themselves. As a writer and director she has created pieces which bring a variety of voices and experience to the stage. Carlisle is nationally recognized for her leadership in education, theatre, and women's studies.

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Cynthia Vagnetti, nationally known interviewer, documentary photographer, and visual storyteller has applied field-based disciplines from oral history, ethnography, and journalism to "find the story" and acquire primary source materials on farmers and ranchers. Ms. Vagnetti creates partnerships to produce projects for civil discourse through the arts and for public television, radio, and Web. Her primary source collection, *Voices from the Field,* is forthcoming in video and book. She is an educational speaker on women, food production and consumption, and their relationship to the land.

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