

# Let Me Feed You

## Community vs Commodity Food

By Phil Retberg



Community food is a resurgence of what used to be: the direct exchange of food from producer to patron; Vitality in our rural places; A sense of place; Roots. It aims to reduce the emptiness of our rural places, the anonymity of our food, and the nutritional void of volume over quality. It values interconnectedness, variety, symbiosis. It seeks to reward stewards, makers, artisans, and above all—eaters. It all comes down to the pleasure of a meal, and the gain from it.

Commodity food, as it has become since WWII, has been a boon for the food processing industry, the chemical industry, and most recently, the patented seed industry. However, for every corporate entity that it has enriched, the rural communities and farms, from which commodity agriculture extracts products, suffer.

*The difference is the food customer.  
The method of production is our choice.*

Monocultures, confinement feeding operations, GMO's, centralized slaughter, and mass distribution have given the consumer convenient, but bland and nutritionally deficient, food. These methods have made the farmer faceless. They co-mingle the best and the worst and charge the least, to be subsidized to profitability. They have made our farms lonely places, which children leave, once the hazardous materials signs go up. They have bankrupted our farms, monetarily and spiritually.

*We have all suffered the consequences.  
The method of production is our choice.*

When our rural places are re-invigorated, they are repopulated. Varieties of flora and fauna, of people and businesses, of ages and experiences all converge to fill the void left by the blight of misuse, neglect, or willful destruction. Dependence occurs, and we grow for it. Healing occurs, and we and nature thrive. And the food nurtures us, heals us, strengthens us, and pleases us.

As a farmer, I love that I know my patron's names, and their kids' names, and their pets' names. I take seriously their ailments, their struggles, and their successes. I nurture them, their unborn children, and their dying grandmother. My living is through their support, both financial and moral. All of us want to do the best for each other. A community is built around a farm. Its successes and failures are shared. That produces ownership.

*Support, which in turn supports your community.  
The method of production is our choice.*

For the resurgence of local eco-agriculture to continue, and succeed, we all need to row in turn. Corporate agriculture cannot co-opt local as it has organic. It will fight. One of the weapons of corporations is to use their government to place obstacles in the way of "competitors." In many places around the country, community food movements are flourishing despite the bureaucratic hurdles.

*Let me feed you.  
The method of production is our choice.*

*Philip Retberg is a community food farmer and conductor of Quill's End Farm in Penobscot, ME.*

**All of us want to do the best for each other. A community is built around a farm. Its successes and failures are shared.**

## Husbandry

The husband, unlike the "manager" or the would-be objective scientist, belongs inherently to the complexity and the mystery that is to be husbanded, and so the husbanding mind is both careful and humble.

—Wendell Berry



ALLIANCE FOR  
DEMOCRACY

**JOIN NOW!**

Membership includes a subscription to **JUSTICE RISING**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  \$50 membership

Address \_\_\_\_\_  \$35 regular membership

\_\_\_\_\_  \$25 tight-budget membership

Phone \_\_\_\_\_  Monthly sustaining member @ \_\_\_\_\_/mo.

Email \_\_\_\_\_  I want to be a member, but can't afford a donation now.

\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_ additional contribution.

Chapter Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Payment (circle one): Mastercard Visa Check Money Order

Card# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please clip and return to Alliance for Democracy, P.O. Box 540115, Waltham, MA 02454-0115