

Hope springs eternal, even from the most cynical of bones.

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April. Spring soils, roused from sleep by a gentle vernal Sun, toss tumescence to the sky and open once again to the miracle of birth. The creation of life. The production of food. By a culture of people called "farmers" who assume responsibility for feeding their neighbours: the most profound responsibility of all; the creation of community.

Standing on the edge of a steamy field bearing witness to life's re-emergence, the seductiveness of farming coaxes hope from even the most cynical of bones. Like seasonal comfort food for the eye (visual oatmeal?), the stirring earth evokes optimism in the hearts of farmers that at times flies in the face of professional advice from those who toil over farm ledgers on their behalf ("...that barn of yours has got a pretty broad side, tell me again just how come it is you can't seem to read the writing on it?").

Time for another rotation of the wheel. The feel of accomplishment that comes from using life's resources wisely to produce (actually create) a product few other can. Exercising good stewardship domain over land and beast.

This year, for the first time in the history of Canadian agriculture, many farmers will be under that wheel rather than behind it. The culprit? Economic concentration. The growth of multinational corporate control over farmer's margins. A lack of understanding by government of the physics of capital and the economic leadership required to ensure, as capital flows through our communities, that WE capture the best of IT but do not allow IT to capture US. Taking particular care to look after the needs of the youth and those who exercise stewardship. For they are the ones to whom tomorrow is entrusted.

Sitting in my Bowen Island office gazing out across my own "spring fields" (of dreams, that is: the snow-capped Tantalus Range, the sparkling blue waters of Howe Sound that encircle it's shore like a lover's hand a waist) I yearn in my heart for what agricultural policy could be in this country and the leadership Canada could be taking at a global level. And, in a mood of optimism, believe it possible...

UPDATE: The Canada -Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project

So far, 80 farmers have participated in the Exchange in just 14 months. As part of Phase Three's WINTER 2000 Exchange, BC farmers traveled to Cuba in January and February to tour large scale cooperative farms in Ciego De Avila, Camaguay, Holguin and Santiago de Cuba provinces and urban organic gardens in Havana. This brings to 80 the number of farmers who have participated in this Exchange since January 1999 — 53 of them from Canada and 27 from Cuba.

I am pleased to announce very strong and exciting support for the Project from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CARE), the Canadian Society for International Health and both the Canadian and Cuban chapters of the Physicians for Global Survival. An advisory Board comprised of representation from University of Victoria (Cooperatives), Simon Fraser University (Resource and Environmental Management), University of British Columbia (Agriculture), Queens University (Philosophy), the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and perhaps CUSO is being put in place

Off Farm Doesn't Have To Be Out Of Sector.

Off farm doesn't have to be out of sector. Partnering in new cooperative linkages with farmers in other regions of the world to capture margins for organic, non-GMO product — margins lost to multinational corporations — is not only do-able, it is inevitable if we are to come to any resolution of our looming food crisis.

Adding value doesn't have to mean building a potato chip mill at the end of the drive way. Or opening a "farm bed and breakfast". What we need is to add market value to the stewardship activities our farmers are already leaders at undertaking. In concert with farmers in other countries with whom we have a strategic advantage. Cooperatively capturing back margins that have been soaked up by market concentration in the pre and post-farm gate sectors. Margins that are legitimately due the sustainable providers of the food itself. (It's called leveling the playing field.)

Check out the notice in this month's issue about reserving your place on next fall and winter tours!

Somewhat Outrageous... a letter of apology to Reena Virk

Dear Reena; I didn't know you, but like millions of others was deeply disturbed by your tragic death and as an adult must gravely apologize for my part in the creation of a society in which our youth are angry enough to murder their schoolmates in cold blood. We are all responsible to you for that, though most will prefer to write Kelly Ellard off as a socio-path — "broken" somehow — rather than accept her problems as our own.

Reading the media's callous and invasive description of you as a person only compounded my sadness:

"She had trouble fitting in with her peers. At 14, she was big for her age... and somewhat hirsute." (Neal Hall, Vancouver Sun, March 30, 2000);

and

"She was, like all 14-year-old girls, insecure about her looks and desperately in need of friends. But fitting in wasn't easy for Reena Virk, who had brown skin, substantial size... and dark body hair" (Mark Hume, National Post April 1, 2000).

Had you — whom they never knew — the misfortune to suffer from poor personal hygiene or bad breath or a host of unattractive personal habits, "fitting in" may indeed have been difficult. But big for your age? Brown skin? Hirsute? Where is this coming from? Doubtful it would be from your grief-stricken peers... Speculation by a teacher, perhaps? Surmised by a journalist? Replicated without attribution? And if so, what does THIS mean?

On behalf of all the ravishingly large, dark skinned women with dark body hair out there, women who are vibrant and deeply loved friends and partners for their outer and inner beauty, don't buy it Reena. Even though it appeared in print.