Introduction to the Second Edition

As I put the finishing touches on the second edition of this book, the sun is coming up, and the quality of its first light is pulling my eyes eastward over the ocean, away from the computer screen, as if by some great magnet. I go outside and put my bare feet on the ground and let it wake me. As this is happening, leaves the earth over are opening, and the instantaneous increase in temperature, which does not seem appreciable to my partner, who is fishing in the surf and shivering, is enough to wake up more microorganisms than there are grains of sand in the entire world, and they begin to breathe and eat and release and die in a dizzying infinite orgy of heat and sugar and acid and gas, thereby (among other things) producing the smell I associate with a spring morning. I marvel, for this ritual sun gazing feels novel to me, yet is as ancient a human practice as our oldest civilizations, and predates even human animals, in a contract between the sun and non-human existence that traces to a blindingly improbable moment, when the chemical trappings of our planet crashed with the sun's energy to produce what we now often take for granted: life.

The sun's light has not yet reached Redwood City, California, where Impossible Burger is headquartered. I have recently read about their process for producing the "bleeding" plant-based burger that is all over menus and the media, made from soy and potato and a liquid ferment of genetically modified yeast. I have not seen their production facilities, or the vats of liquid heme protein within them, but I can imagine their burger's color. Just days ago, I uprooted my garden cover crop of oats and Austrian winter peas, and raked through soil the color of dark chocolate to look at the tiny nodules on the roots of the pea plants where rhizobia live. Rhizobia are a type of bacteria that can take nitrogen from the air and convert it to a form plants can use.

"Nitrogen fixation," as we call it, occurs in these nodules, and if I dust the soil from them and my hands, and gently pierce the nodule with my fingernail, I can see a blood-red or pink color to assure me that the relationship between these peas and their rhizobia herds has been successful. This color is produced by leghemoglobin, which is the same protein that Impossible Foods uses to make plant-based meat "bleed" and taste meaty.

The process of nitrogen fixation in the nodules of legume plants, such as my garden's pea cover crop, depends on the health of various biological pathways, and involves the enzyme nitrogenase, which contains iron, cobalt, and/or molybdenum — mineral components of soils in right balance. Recently, I have been studying the epigenetic regulation of mineral deficiency in plants as well as in humans, which is to say the systemic response to environmental conditions that is remembered by plant and animal DNA and passed on to succeeding generations. Did my garden soil contain enough cobalt or molybdenum to enable nitrogenase catalysts for rhizobia to do its work? Had it not, the nodules on the roots of the pea cover crop may have been merely white or a pale banana color, but the plants would grow all the same, and I might pick their shoots for a salad, and go about my day. But what signals would the lack of trace metals send to the pea plant as it grew, and produced seed for next year, and even to my body, or the bodies of my offspring, as I ate a salad from my garden? Impossible Foods uses genetic technology to isolate leghemoglobin from soybean root nodule bacteria, and then encodes it into yeast which, when fermented, multiplies and produces more leghemoglobin, which churns in stainless steel vats, ready to be added to the company product.

I pulled the roots and the shoots of my oat and pea cover crop aside, and made tracks in the deep coffee-colored soil for my onions, cabbage, sculpit, kale, and leek crops. As a proponent of low till agriculture, making furrows slightly disturbs me, just as it disturbs the hyphae of many beneficial soil fungi, such as mycorrhizae, for which I have spent a year or more ensuring a home in my garden. Jeff Poppen, the Barefoot Farmer, swears by a minimal, shallow disturbance of soil at seasonal transitions, to kill the microbial communities associated with one seasonal crop, and make for an awakening and fermentation of the new generation of soil life. On the basis of this belief, he grows over eight acres of organic vegetables without irrigation, every single year. This thought provided solace, as I watched a dazzling exodus of earthworms as they made their way towards darkness after I disturbed the peace. The smell,

the activity, the solar energy, fermentation, life and death that I could literally feel emanating from my garden at that moment, and on top of it the crashing of the ocean waves and the jiggling, living sea foam on the beach today, gives me muse for a thousand years of Impossible Burgers. I want food with the sun in it. I want living food.

There will be a thousand and one attempts to secure food in our day and age. These include test tubes, pills, and super crops, and we very likely won't be able to stop the scientific approaches which take nature out of context. I don't deny Impossible Burger its place, and indeed won't deny its intention, in a colossal and very flawed system. But I am a lifelong pilgrim for food which feeds us more than substance, and for food that remains our way of participating in an energetic discourse and a reciprocity with the earth. By this I mean food from the soil, well-raised, full of solar and magnetic and mineral richness, synergy which isn't being piped to a seedling or encoded in a virus.

There are resonating questions which have challenged me, appropriately, during the revision of this book. They remain: Is such food relevant? Is it possible? Are we running out of time?

In middle spring, around Mother's Day, the grass on a North Carolina pasture rises out of incessant rain, suddenly, to waist high. As you walk through it, you can't help but hold your arms out like wings, letting the seed heads, gravid with risk, brush on the new calluses of your palms. The sheep will be covered with it, and their lambs down in the depths of the grass will bleat a high, worried song, just so their mothers will answer. The cows with their awkward horns will be up to their chins in food. On the edges of the pasture giant tractors will mow paths beside the road, and cars will swerve off the pavement, compacting the soil and thereby making way for broom, poison ivy, privet, multifloral rose, and a litany of other plants eager to make use of disturbed ground. The sheep will peer over the fence I've made to sniff at them, nibbling carefully. The lambs will call. The cows will upend their slow tails to swat at flies in the sun.

This grass, this food, with hemicellulose, its constituent cellulose, and lignin is the most abundant food source in the world. Together with trees, grasses spread over more of the earth's surface than any other food source. If you stand or sit in the tall grass in North Carolina in May, while the wind

blows it like water and the muted purples and grays and greens of the seeds shimmer in the sun, you will wish you could eat this food, and receive more from its warmth and its wholesome smell. But you can't.

And you will wonder: what if we poison all the honeybees? You might have just passed over a stand of milkweed, and scoured it over to find no Monarch caterpillars. So, what if we mine all the topsoil, collapsing it into rivers and wind? What if we drain all the aquifers? What if we starve out the cobalt, and rhizobia in their little root houses? What will grow then? What will eat the sun's gifts, what will root in, and send messages to the worms and the protists?

Grass. Broom. Poison ivy. Kudzu. Sedge. Privet. Autumn Olive … cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin. And the hooves and the spit, the dung and the piss of the animals who eat *that* food will be the only things that can bring back any lively conversation. Any discourse with the elements, with the beetles. With us.

As agriculture remains highly politicized, corporatist, and extractive, we need the herbivores. We need a stewardship of the land that includes animals, and we need the nutrients that they can translate from the sun and the soil and the rain. And if we can put men on the moon, we can manage our relationship with animals mindfully, on any scale. I choose food with the sun in it. I choose living food.

And so, the intention for the new edition of this book is the same as it ever was: to heal. When I wrote it, I was healing myself from a massive fissure in life and in endeavor, while simultaneously bringing about perspective on healing land and systems for food. I am astonished at how much I have learned, and how much my positions and understandings have become more complex since the first release of this work. So much has changed, but the seed and the medium have not. We still need, we will need, volumes of thought and practice about the noble contract between people and food that don't abandon all hope for a positive human relationship with sunlight and rain and soil. This book is based on the belief that on a warming planet, divided by injustice and doubt and starvation on many levels, every eater has a way to conjure hope and empowerment, not tomorrow, but *now.*

In this update, I hope you will find some of the same information but honed, and also new information and thought that speaks to some of the real idiosyncrasies of being an omnivore in our current times. You will also find, as ever, deeply considered problems — my intention has never been to present

the equation as solved. I hope you will see, also, what a fantastic dilemma this sort of book is, as it tries to approach the world as it is while fashioning it forward, toward the future. My hope is that the conversation continues, and that you take from this work not only meaning and cause to participate in a very worthy exploration of your humanity, but also enjoyment. Community. Vitality. Deliciousness. If we cannot keep sight of these enlivening characteristics, even as we air all of the difficult questions, then we deny ourselves the very thing that will give us longevity: recognition of ourselves as natural beings, as animals, connected participants in a wild yet elegant universe. May we recognize that our privilege is greater than or equal to the challenge ahead.

Pulled Pork with Hot Vinegar Sauce, Chow Chow, and Corn Pancakes
Recipe page 215–217

Section 1

The Ethical Meat Eater

Photo credit: Cindy Kunst

Porchetta with Persimmon, Chestnut, and Pine
Recipe page 228–229

Introduction

- **Ethical meat comes from an animal that enjoyed a good life.** The animal acted out its natural tendencies, in a way that did not over-deplete resources but contributed to healthy natural cycles. It was cared for and not neglected. It endured little stress in its life.
- **Ethical meat comes from an animal that was afforded a good death.** The animal endured little stress in handling on its way to slaughter. It did not suffer long, but was slaughtered in a way that rendered it unconscious instantly, and then humanely relieved of its blood.
- **Ethical meat is butchered properly,** making full use of the carcass out of thriftiness, efficiency, and respect for the life that was given as food.
- **Ethical meat is cooked or preserved properly,** maximizing nutritional benefit and paying homage to the important rituals of deliciousness.

I was a vegetarian for nine years, and a vegan for two. I watched a grueling video in high school about the horrors of an industrial slaughterhouse. I did some light reading in environmental philosophy, and made a decision. I was largely ignorant. I was not making a huge difference in the lives and deaths of animals, was not looking at the bigger picture of global human health and environmental restoration, was not actively changing mass wrongdoing. I was motivated by deep empathy and justified political aggravation, but my solution, sadly, mostly helped only me.

I spent my college years learning what I could about the scientific, political, and cultural intricacies of agriculture. I traveled to different countries, learned about drastically different attitudes toward food and land, and saw the ways that people have shaped their corners of the earth in the quest for nutrition. In Vietnam it is a gesture of friendship to place food in another's bowl. When, in

2004 in a rural Hai Duong village in northern Vietnam, a small woman named Loi placed a stringy piece of water buffalo into my dish at dinner, I began my journey into the meaningful consumption of animals.

Before that moment, my diet had been one of luxury, and a desire to escape a system I felt I could not affect. When I ate that piece of flesh as an act of communion, I checked in to another way of thinking. Eating gained new meaning, as I was very aware that Loi herself had milked and cared for, and eventually slaughtered, that animal for our meal. I started to look for the bigger picture, and solidified my decision to devote my life to food. I have spent nearly two decades since as an omnivore, working with food from almost every angle, with the belief that we can make a difference in the well-being of plants, animals, and the earth, while still loving all food and seeking good health.

Time and again in America, we're handed myriad reasons to question our food supply. Between climate pressures, environmental resource limitations, food safety scares, political maneuvering, media hullabaloo, corporate mergers, impending energy crises, trade deals, population woes, consumption rates, worldwide hunger and poverty, and dominion over the very seed required to create the next generation of food and fiber, we're constantly vacillating, with our big national voice, between justification and condemnation of a globalized food system. Within this passion play, consumers, with their tiny individual voices, have both ultimate power and very little power at all. We drive the machine with our buying dollars, but we are simultaneously so hoodwinked by marketing ploys, dietary "rules," and nutrition trends that we become overwhelmed, dependent, and easily duped.

Within this maelstrom, the meat and dairy sector are continually at the eye of the storm. Meat has been demonized since the 1960s, when our nation became afraid of fat and cholesterol. Since then, depending on what research we favor, meat and dairy are either entirely responsible or completely forgiven for all our health woes. Regardless of the trending attitude toward saturated fat, animal protein, and cholesterol, we find it easy to eliminate animal products from our diet when we hear about inhumane treatment of animals, confined animal feed operations (CAFOs), pink slime in ground beef, and the effects of added hormones and antibiotics on our meat. Yet I haven't set out to write a book revealing the horrors of the industrial food system or the meat industry within it, and I certainly do not aim to defend either. Others have done plenty of this work already, on both sides. Instead, this book seeks to offer

alternatives to the status quo. It seeks to educate buyers and homesteaders about their role within the whole. In other words: you are not just a victim, you are not helpless, and you are not merely the last link in a long chain of missteps, bloodlust, and greed.

I join eaters everywhere in their opposition to genetically modified organisms (GMOs), overuse of antibiotics, and inhumane living conditions for all beings. I also seek to understand the vast latticework of past and current political, social, economic, and environmental factors that make the question of what to put in your mouth three to six times a day very perplexing indeed, whether you choose to eat meat or not. Our opposition can be simple and absolute. Our options are not so easy. This book asks a number of "how" questions, and offers deeply pondered possible answers. How can we work from within a fantastically flawed food system to create real food? How can we work in accessible ways, without alienating any food citizen or farmer? How is it possible to create models that drive an economy, social synergy, and environmental restoration that work for the world as we know it now, and the world we want in the future?

I urge you to come by your food more honestly by exploring the ideas presented in this book, because I believe there is a lot more the everyday food citizen can change — and that he can eat a lot better in the process, too. We can endeavor to source and consume meat with more of an understanding of the issues across the supply chain; checking out is not our only option. I'd argue, too, that it's not the best option. Nor is it viable to make more and more demands of farmers, regardless of the size and type of their farms. If you come away from this book with nothing but a sausage recipe and one fun fact, let that fact be this: Across the meat supply chain, the farmer makes the least amount of money, and has possibly the most difficult and sacred job in the journey. It's time to kick it up another notch, and realize that truly ethical meat is going to take community effort. If we are to be ethical meat eaters, or good eaters at all, we will buy differently, cook differently, and eat different things.

Duck Rillettes
Recipe page 241

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Buying Differently

We cannot expect ethical meat, or any other truly better food, to simply arise in some pure form from the food system we currently have. If we don't change the system, we will constantly be required to compromise what we know is right, and euphemize what we know is happening. Our behemoth of a food industry, which supports suffering and whole-system degradation of epic proportions, is often justified by asserting that it is our job to feed the world. This goes with an unspoken assumption that there is only one way to feed the world, and it must be the way that we've found, and we must be doing it now. I'll not surprise you by saying that we are not, in fact, "feeding the world" — and that there is another way. Whenever possible, food and essential needs should be generated in a sphere close to home, in an economy of body and household that I call the "first economy." After that, food should happen on the community level, in systems I call "middle economies." It is possible to foster agriculture on every soil that can feed communities, and so for basic needs, and that vital sovereignty for all, functioning middle economies are a more hopeful way to feed the world. Instead, a whole range of factors, mostly driven by money, have led us askew, into a dependency on "external economy," a vast system that takes place far away from us and involves too many players and too many resources.

I have been involved in movements for nearly 15 years that address this fundamental issue: how to create middle systems within the current status quo, to produce food and provide essential human services. Many days, I wonder if it is working, and it is difficult to imagine us ever entirely abandoning external economy, because it now stretches across the globe. But I have seen small farms, conscious eaters, and effective activism grow exponentially over the years, which leads me to think that we must keep trying. And like it or

not, the huge, dysfunctional external system is what we are working with right now. We cannot avoid it, and we are both contributors to it and victims of it, both farmers and non-farmers. Within this reality, we need to promote first and middle systems as much as possible, because they are smaller, more synergistic, and include plants, humans, and non-human animals, from which arise more conscious economies and trade. We also need to try to apply the positive aspects of synergy and diversity to larger systems, to see if that works as well.

As a result of the system in place today, even if your meat has been fed organic grain, it may not have lived well. Even if your meat has suffered less in life, it may not have died a just and clean death. Some of the opportunities you have toward truly good meat come from extremely enterprising, well-meaning, expensive, and risky capital investments in good farming; these efforts deserve our every praise, even if we are still struggling to see them grow to accommodate our needs. But other opportunities toward good meat come from extremely enterprising efforts to capitalize only on your desire for good meat; these efforts deserve our every skepticism. Unfortunately, the honest food citizen, with troubles of her own, living her amazing and busy life, is hard pressed to know if she is facing a praiseworthy effort toward good food, or a backward and greedy one. This is the Catch-22 of our attempt to repair wholescale foodthink, figuring it out as we go. This book does not pretend to have all the answers. Instead, it simply seeks to honestly air the conundrums, show us that we have more in common than we think, and assert that it is worth it to keep trying out different agricultures, different economies, and different philosophies to improve all life.

I believe that, right now, the best way to access good food and good meat is by raising it ourselves, or by buying it directly from a fellow community member who has done so. And for those of us not able or willing to produce our own animals for meat, I assert that exceptional, good meat, right now, for all who endeavor to support it, will require us to pay more money, stimulating a "middle market." It will also require persons of means to subsidize the availability and viability of good food for those who cannot pay more. This is not an obvious activism for most people, because our current system is informed by an economy and cultural norms that prioritize efficiency and profit over care and sustainability, and the individual over all else. The way we produce, process, distribute, and consume our food cannot be overhauled without massive changes to every dominant paradigm within our culture. The option

within reach is for those with the power to do so to subvert those paradigms on an individual level, or on a community level through cooperative or capitalistic endeavors, and to support one another in doing so and with respect to accessibility and to justice. This is a book about how to do that.

Meat costs more than you realize. So does all food. If you're purchasing from the supermarket, you're buying meat that is heavily subsidized by the US government (via your tax dollars), a process that removes much of the risk and cost of its production and allows the industry to drive a competitive price at the point of sale. Additionally, much of the meat from larger farms comes from vertically integrated food businesses, meaning that the business owns more than one piece of the supply chain, and thus decreases its cost.

Let's take chicken, for example. A vertically integrated poultry business owns the hatchery (baby chick farm), the chickens (via contracts with farmers), the slaughterhouse, and the entire packaging and distribution infrastructure. The corporation owns the whole process, from egg to table. This benefits the company because as the product changes it becomes more valuable, and the ensuing profits stay within the company. The costs of taking the product through all these changes are decreased, because there are not three or four different companies along the way trying to eke profit from their rung on the ladder. And waste and cost can be controlled and even offset by the company anywhere along the way.

Research has shown that industrial hog farmers pay an average of eight dollars more than they make on each animal to raise it, and that corporate beef producers spend 20 to 90 dollars more than each animal is worth to raise cattle. How is this backward economy possible? Due to federal subsidies, which incentivize the growers to continue producing; due to vertical integration, which allows the meat businesses to make that money back as the product moves up the supply chain; and finally, due to the sheer size of the operations. The more chicken our sample corporation offers the market, from whole birds to bone-in thighs to emulsified cartilage and string meat for nuggets, the less the company needs to charge on each product before breaking even.

Instead of paying the true cost for your food at the point of sale, you're currently paying for it in pieces. And the more corners that are cut in its production, the more you pay later, in higher healthcare costs and in degradation of your environment. If we can begin to see the ripple effects, it becomes clear that a Big Mac, which normally retails for about four dollars, should really be

selling for about eleven. I know from experience. I began my journey into what would amount to a decade of farming in 2003, growing organic vegetables, cut flowers, and meat. We raised a diversity of crops and livestock on our farm, to increase our marketing appeal, maximize nutrient cycling on our land, and feed our family. We were doing what many small farmers feel called to do: creating a middle market for meat and other food that people could trust, and that could stimulate the local economy.

Chronic Poverty, Social Justice, Privilege, and Power

As we discuss the true cost of food, we must also assess the complexity of income inequality. Yes, food should cost more, but not everyone can pay more. The good food movement is infamous for its inability to answer this nagging issue. Its dominant theory is that the message of food's importance, and therefore the prioritization of nutrient-dense, whole foods that support community economies, will reach people of means first in order to gain mainstream popularity. This "trickle down" theory of ideals is akin to a similar theory in economics, and after 20 or so years of work in this sphere, it is clear to me that farmers and food have enough complex issues to gridlock the movement into a "niche" perception, and that food is so steeped in our political, economic, and cultural framework that we cannot overhaul food systems without a massive re-education. Even if the privileged and powerful want to change society for the better, we must accept that we are blind when it comes to doing so.

Chronic poverty throughout our country and the world causes people to live in fear, live without shelter, in poor health without access to care, and without a voice in legal and social affairs. This means that they cannot prioritize high quality food, even when low quality food is linked to so many markers of health and sovereignty. Efforts have existed across lifetimes to relieve hunger and raise awareness of the health issues faced by underserved communities, however it is not until recently that society has begun to accept, as part of the global conversation, the basic tenets of social justice that might begin to make a dent in the hunger problem. What readers should understand is that poverty is systemic and chronic for many people, and it is steeped in racism, addiction, exploitive housing markets, and other deeply rooted issues of marked injustice that are built into the very framework of our nation. Charitable work to feed people will always be helpful, but people will not be able to control and choose the right food without an end to chronic and systemic injustice.

There must be effort on our part, every single day, to educate ourselves about racial

equity, social justice, and chronic poverty. There must be effort in every food education initiative, be it a class or a coalition, to call out privilege and blindness. And there must be action, as we become educated, to speak up and out. Further, as we seek to build new economies, we must take care to undo the ways that blindness causes us to normalize constructs that are harmful or dismissive of others. We cannot assume that a new food economy will include everyone, and serve everyone, if we do not build it to do so. It is clear to me more than ever, that we must also be brave enough to take our activism to a higher level. While people of privilege do a very worthy thing when they spend their hard-earned dollars to support local business and good agriculture, the next level of activism is speaking out in the community, volunteering time and skill to address issues of poverty in your own community, and becoming politically active in support of healthy food for everyone.

Resources abound for folks to begin educating themselves about these issues, and I have included a list in the back of this book. I welcome your sources and your feedback as well, as I also build my own understanding of this activism.

I had mixed results making money as a community-supported farmer. Both my husband and I worked off-farm jobs full-time, while raising a family and trying to build, manage, and market a farm on a big enough economic scale to support ourselves. We faced many problems in all of our enterprises, but our biggest problems were headlined by production inefficiencies and economy of scale issues. We had neither large enough numbers of animals on the ground, nor the systems in place to raise animals in large enough numbers. When it came to the production of animals, we faced these main obstacles:

1. The high cost of feed inputs, largely not customizable by us in relation to the price we could charge at the point of sale.
2. The high cost of slaughter and processing, largely not customizable by us due to regulatory obstacles, and in relation to the price we could charge at the point of sale.
3. The growing demand for gourmet and niche meat products such as heritage breed, certified-organic/non-GMO and further-processed foods that we were inconsistent in our ability to profitably produce, due to reasons #1 & #2 above, as well as the price and volume

competition we faced from vertically integrated industrial agribusiness. (See sidebar case study: The Cost of Organic, GMO-Free Pork.)

Note the threads in these issues, which one might call roots. One is the lack of control, resulting in the need to outsource parts of the operation, which always costs money and always limits quality options. The other is the disconnect at the point of sale. Our middle business, operating within and alongside the huge, external system that our customers also patronized, made it very difficult for us to garner middle-market prices. Community-level middle economies face these deeply rooted issues every minute of every day.

Our solution to the problems we faced was an attempt to specialize. We dropped commercial production of vegetables completely, drastically downsized commercial cut flowers, and focused on meat. We scaled up the number of animals, paid closer attention to feed and breeds, and sought to educate our customers and our processor about the difficulties within the supply chain that put limitations on the end product. We began carrying specialty products such as rubs and dry cured salamis, produced by others with niche meat business ventures. At the end of 2012, when we saw that we were paying 52 percent of our gross profits to processing and packaging, we developed plans for our own kind of middle-system vertical integration: a butcher shop.

The butcher shop would allow us to pay the processor only a kill fee to slaughter and dress (remove the innards from) the animals. Then we could butcher the animals further at our own facility, turning them into retail muscle cuts, specialty fresh sausages, cured and smoked meats, and other items. This would vastly increase the diversity and number of products available to our customers, and put processing revenues into our pockets, rather than someone else's. Granted, we would have additional labor and overhead costs establishing the shop, but our projections showed potential.

The shop opened in October of 2013, and improved our processing costs and the products available to our customers almost immediately. But the farm still faced the issue of feeding animals on a large scale. Even with the shop buying animals at a reasonable price per pound on carcass weight (the weight once the animal is killed and dressed), the farm remained financially stressed. Then our marriage very suddenly collapsed. The farm shut down. All the animals were sold. The shop remained open, maintaining tight margins as it tried to offer only local meat to the communities in and around Asheville,

North Carolina. Since the first edition of this book was published, the shop has morphed into a bar and restaurant, with a robust whole animal program. The fact of the matter is, the economic disconnect for whole food purveyors doesn't stop at the farm gate.

I firmly believe that a farm, with a sister business like our shop, can become a viable model for food entrepreneurs in the growing middle food economy. But it will take community effort. It will take increased mindfulness and ingenuity among both farmers and consumers. It will also take failures like my own. I can see now, and can communicate, the utility in my failure. I can speak about the way we were grazing our cattle incorrectly, and keeping farm enterprises in isolation. I can speak frankly about the declining quality of life of so many farmers, leading to depression and fractured families. If I don't tell you about these things, they don't move us forward. If I don't speak about them, they remain swallowed in a hog wallow in Old Fort, North Carolina, under old tires and spiny pigweed and six years of winter wind.

The community of people working to love the land, to love food, and to repair vital natural systems is growing every day. We are learning something new and important every single day. This is so hopeful. And every day that we learn, the fact remains that farmers are still facing the same problems mentioned above, while trying to create new paradigms within the current framework. To boot, not every meat farmer can open a butcher shop, and in many ways, farmers are in the same boat as consumers, in terms of what type of food and agriculture they can afford to throw their weight behind. Ultimately, the consumer faces these problems as well, as he or she asks for reasonable prices on the finished product and seeks the cleanest product possible. More often than not, the consumer is unaware of the premium he or she is asking for, and what business, profitable or not, is behind each premium applied as the meat travels along the supply chain.

So next time you see that sign for boneless pork chops at $6.99 a pound at the local grocery, ask yourself where that meat came from, and what systems are in place on a massive scale to drive that price. And then, please, do not proceed to the farmers' market and ask why the boneless chops there cost $8.99 a pound when you can get them at the local grocery for two dollars less. When you make this argument, you are basically asking a farmer why you can't pay commodity prices for a homegrown pork chop — raised by a non-vertically integrated family business, who receives no subsidies and produces a small

volume of pork under a completely different production system. These days, a pork chop is not a pork chop is not a pork chop. These are different systems, different products, different markets, different standards. Different prices.

Not everyone can pay more, right now, and not every farmer can happily embrace pastured, poison-free animals. I am well aware of this perplexing issue, and the fact that what we face is a giant, stinking problem. We may have the intention to create new systems, but lack the ability to do so. Many of us are stuck. Farmers can't pay more, most hungry, well-intentioned shoppers cannot pay more either, and so we go, around and around, asking more of each other, blaming each other, and begging forgiveness from each other, our refrigerators and frying pans all the while full of subpar food. This is a ghastly problem, but don't stop reading. I believe enough of us can pay more and enough of us are industrious — and to some of us, both apply. Luckily, eating animals is most rewarding to the industrious soul. And I believe that any person, farmer or not, regardless his resources or intent, could take something from this book to build better first and middle food economies.

Enterprising in Agriculture

If you are the investing type, I urge you to invest in farmers. Land may be a place where people put their money, but land-based businesses are generally hard up. From my own experience as a grower, I know what obscene risks and stresses I undertook in order to try better farming practices, especially on a scale that could function alongside and within our current food system. While researching this book, I caught up with Jamie and Amy Ager, the owners of Hickory Nut Gap Farm (HNG), in my community. The Agers started their meat enterprise on Jamie's family land in 2000, inspired by Joel Salatin and others in the alternative agriculture movement, and began promoting grass-fed beef. Now you can find their meat at Whole Foods.

In Asheville, HNG is probably the best-known effort to scale up sustainably raised meat. "I was young when we started, and a different brand of idealistic than I am now," Jamie says. Since they started HNG, the Agers have taken many steps to market their grass-fed beef, pastured pork, lamb, and poultry, including experimental production models and, in recent years, contracting with other growers to produce animals for their brand. These efforts to scale their local products to meet their customers' demands have been extremely exciting, stressful, and full of opportunity as well as trial.

"I am still idealistic, to a degree," Jamie says. "I believe we have to change things in our food system."

The difference in the idealism lies in the knowledge Jamie and Amy have gained about the complexities of agriculture, and the flexibility and risk-taking needed to face them head on. Not everyone can do it. "I've learned what an incredible amount of money, time, and emotion it requires to move the needle on good meat," Jamie shares. This has bred in him a moderation, and an almost insatiable internal questioning about what to do, and whether these systems are scalable. For Jamie and Amy, it's worth it to keep trying. They have seen positive change, and their buyers certainly thank them for it. "Every community, every farm, and every market is going to look different, which is another thing that makes it hard," Jamie adds. "At the end of the day, I'm a farmer," he says, "and I'm about farmers making money, and staying farmers. If the chance for a young farmer is to invest in a corporation, and put up a chicken house, so be it. He's enterprising in agriculture, and that is hard enough as it is."

I'd like to see us developing systems that are profitable for farmers, but better for the chicken and the diner as well. If it was easier for young farmers to "enterprise in agriculture" that was more sustainable for whole systems than that corporate chicken house, that would be ideal. In pursuit of this wish, I charge food citizens to regard the effort of farming more politely, and consider undertaking enterprises in good agriculture, farm education, food justice endeavors, and research into sustainable agriculture. You can do this by buying local food, and you can take it even further by investing in local food and a local farm. You can invest in organizations that are driving social change, and improving access to real food for all. It is not enough for us to ask our stewards of the land to shoulder so much of the risk of forging our new systems. After all, come dinnertime, farmers have to choose what food to buy, just like you do, after spending their long day choosing how much to fund better agriculture. It's a double whammy. In this way, local farms, butcher shops, bakeries, feed mills, and other middle-system business owners are indeed our bravest pioneers in the journey toward better food.