



Philosophical Ponderings of a Farmer

Small Farms and the Capitalist Model

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I see so many of our local produce farmers struggling to make ends meet. Either they go into debt each season to pay the bills while waiting for the crops to ripen or they don't pay themselves a living wage, or... And it makes me wonder, how does small-scale farming fit into our current economic system?

I've come to the conclusion that it doesn't. Capitalism relies on ever expanding markets and corporate growth, while small-scale veggie farming focuses more on filling a need (food) in our local communities. Many of our small farmers don't want to expand their operations, while others feel that the market for local food is already saturated and isn't growing much. I think most don't want to invent unhealthy ways to market their products or encourage their customers to eat more simply in order to sell more.

The ideals that the small, local farming movement is based upon are in direct conflict with the capitalist model. Even if our local farmers did decide to expand their operations in order to serve larger markets, at some point they would be required to make trade offs that may conflict with the reasons they got into the business in the first place. Maybe that means simply cultivating with a tractor or maybe it means something more, like mechanizing the wash/pack system. And at what point do profits become more important than ideals?

Historically, many people grew all their own vegetables and bought in staple crops like grain and sugar. Vegetables were not something to be sold, they were just something people grew. I think most of today's small farmers got into veggie production because they loved it, not to make a lot of money. So how can we now turn their operations into profitable businesses? You can read about the Jean Martin Fortier, Curtis Stones, and Ben Hartmans of the world, who are all growing incredible amounts of food (and making amazing profits) on very small spaces. But what about everyone else?