

# NEWSLETTER OF THE RURAL LIFE ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 1984

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\* ATTENTION ALL R.L.A. MEMBERS: \*  
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\* With this issue of the newsletter, your member- \*  
\* ship expires. If you wish to remain on the \*  
\* mailing list, RENEW NOW. Dues are still only \*  
\* \$5.00/household. Send to Jane Plastino, Route 3, \*  
\* Box 42, Canton, NY 13617. (See additional expla- \*  
\* nation of this new policy elsewhere in the news- \*  
\* letter.) \*  
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## LABOR EXCHANGE:



## A NEW PLAN

Labor exchange...sharing one of our most abundant collective resources... sharing skills and experiences..."work parties." This concept, in one form or another, has been kicking around our group for a long time. Everyone likes the idea; it makes sense. We all could use help and/or advice at one time or another, and working together is usually more fun and efficient than working alone.

And, indeed, work and labor has been shared. Ginger Story and Doug Welch had a house-raising a couple of summers ago; Ross Kostin and Laurie Davis had one this past summer. Small crews helped the Bickels put up fencing, Meadowsweet pour a milkroom floor, and John Crowe and Valerie Ingram dig a root cellar. These are just a few examples of the work that we've accomplished cooperatively.

Yet, while most of these projects have been successful and satisfying, many of us feel the exchange of labor is still a much underused mechanism that could only benefit all of the participants in the long run. Despite Bill MacKentley's best effort to organize a very sensible-sounding Labor Coop, there's still a great deal of

resistance, apparently, to getting organized and (perhaps more important) asking for help. We've tossed around lots of reasons and theories for why this is so despite the fact that most RIA'ers profess to think labor exchange is a good idea ("Yeah, of course! Share our skills, pool our resources, right on...").

Without going into those theories right now, suffice it to say that at the last Steering Committee meeting, there was a lot of energy for trying again. A poll of the people there revealed that, for many, this is about the most basic community-building thing we can do. We need each other enough to try a little harder to make it fly.

So, a New Plan was born. Based in part on the experiences of Bob Kleinberg and Fran Lawler, who were part of a successful work exchange in Franklin County, we are going to try to form small, manageable groups of people willing to commit themselves to a set schedule of exchange for one full season.

The idea is to form logical groups (by neighborhood, scheduling compatibility, or whatever comes up) and then set up a work rotation schedule for the coming season (say April to October or November). The dates, set up in advance, will be the basis of a real commitment by the members of the group. That is, if you decide to sign on, you should have every intention of keeping to the schedule--barring unforeseen emergencies or inclement weather, of course. We feel that if the work group is a priority for people, and they know in advance what their commitment entails, it will have a good chance of being successful.

There were some at the meeting who want to commit one day a week to a group of eight or ten, thereby visiting each homestead at least twice during the season. Others felt that would be too much for them this year, but would like to be in a work group once every two or three weeks or five times over the course of the season. (John and I, for instance, both work out right now and feel that six structured days away from home every week would make us crazy--even if we got more done in the long run.)

If YOU are interested in becoming part of a labor exchange group, please do these three things:

1) Think

- about what work you need to do on your place that would benefit from the help of a work party.
- about when you would be ready to have a work party and how many people you might need.
- about how often or how many days total you could commit yourself.
- about how far you would be willing to travel to participate in a work group and what kinds of work you'd do.

2) Call Bill Sutkus (287-3759) or Valerie Summer or David Katz (386-4393) to indicate your interests and get more information.

3) Come to a meeting on Wednesday, March 7 at Meadowsweet (7:30) to work out the details and form groups. We're hoping that people's interests and schedules will let them fall naturally into compatible groups. If not, a little re-arranging and/or negotiating may be in order. It is very important, therefore, that you're pretty clear in your own mind before you come what your needs are and how much of a time commitment you want to make this year.

For those of you who can't become part of a regular work rotation, but are still interested in the occasional trade or one-time larger projects (like a houseraising), we don't mean to preclude those events. We still want to encourage them and encourage people to use the phone tree to publicize them. What we're aiming for is a broader involvement--not a narrower one. If you've never had a work party and would like help planning it (or if you're nervous about calling people), several people have volunteered to help you out. They are: Valerie Ingram (379-9661), David Katz (379-9661), Ross Kostin (Rt. 1, Box 39, Rensselaer Falls), Dick Morrow (265-5783), Valerie Summer (386-4393), and Bill Sutkus (287-3759).

The regular work groups, by the way, may also include the planning process as part of the labor sharing. It seems unrealistic to expect that everyone will know how to plan a work group project--especially one they've never undertaken before. Therefore, call on your group or the people mentioned above if you need help. They'll either help you directly or find someone more familiar with your type of project.

Hopefully, we'll all eventually internalize the habit of thinking in terms of shared labor so that, like the Amish, it will someday become a natural, comfortable process that works for the benefit of everyone.

-- Valerie Ingram



#### SCHEDULE FOR SPRING RIA FILM SERIES

Everyone invited, please mark your calendar. All are Friday nights. Movies begin at 8:00. I now have a copy of the film catalog, and everyone is welcome to browse through it and pick out films to borrow.

--Valerie Summer (386-4393)

#### Friday, March 9

Animal Babies - 11 minutes  
 Africans All - 23 minutes  
 An African Community: The Masai - 16 minutes  
 Spider - 7 minutes

#### Friday, April 13

Riki Tiki Tembo - 11 minutes  
 The People's Commune - 25 minutes  
 China's Villages in Change - 20 minutes  
 Story About Ping - 10 minutes



#### Friday, May 11

Georgie - 6 minutes  
 Russian Peasant - 20 minutes  
 The Soviet Union: A New Look - 25 minutes