



Photo "Wild Cucumber" by Doug Jones

#### A VISION:

#### ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY AS A WHOLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT COMMUNITY

This is a plea for a fresh look at this county's destiny. We need to re-examine our notions and assumptions about our environment, our natural and human resources. Perhaps the people of this community can discover a direction, a set of possibilities, more likely to lead to our greatest happiness and fulfillment than those which our governmental and industrial fathers would like (for various reasons) to impose upon us (often quite subtly).

Too often the views of these "fathers" stem from their deep, somewhat hidden or unconscious entrenchment in a society much more economically complex and urbanized than our local community. They operate with a vision which is narrowly confined by such basic assumptions as:

Ever-increasing industrial expansion and personal consumption of goods and services are always beneficial to any community (= happiness for people?).

Bigness is best.

Governments and corporations, with so many trained technical advisors, know what is good for us in this complex, technological world.

Maybe they don't know — at least as far as our county is concerned. We should counter the tendency of the technocrats to wipe out many of the individual attributes of geographical areas, in their efforts to homogenize the world and make it conform to neat, predictable computer read-outs.

For example, in the name of efficient distribution, most of the food we eat is grown outside of our area, while dairying and beef-raising are encouraged almost to the exclusion of other types of farming by the authorities at Cornell. We have a milk monoculture based on corn and hay; this lack of diversity makes the farmer vulnerable to the whims of a market mostly outside of our area, subject to the dealings of large corporations. By the high-capital farming it recommends, Cornell has helped to further the trend toward conglomeration of farms and land, and the end of the small, diversified, flexible, family-run farm. This trend has seen the abandonment of some "marginal" farms into the hands of speculators and rich city dwellers seeking second homes on land which then sits idle.

The ready acceptance of Cornell's "scientific" advice (heavily influenced by research grants from the fossil-fuel companies), combined with Cornell's lack of originality in suggesting crops and techniques suited to the hilly or poorly-drained (but otherwise fertile) fields, has caused much good land to go to weeds and brush. "If you can't grow corn on it (and use big new machines with expensive parts and planned obsolescence), forget it!" This monoculture approach also limits each acre of land to a very low annual productivity in terms of food directly edible by humans. The statistics on the number of people fed from a 5 or 10 acre, intensively-worked plot in China or Japan should embarrass Earl Butz.

As you read my summary of the special possibilities of our area, you will notice my bias toward "smallness", individual enterprise, and meaningful occupations which fit into a local network of goods and services; also a bias against corporate industrial methods of "developing" an area. And my failure to give much space in this report to federal and state programs will reflect my disillusionment with their ineffective, bureaucratic "solutions" to "problems."

#### I. Economic Underdevelopment as a Saving Grace

If our country has a comparatively low standard of living, a dairy industry in serious trouble, a sizable percentage of underemployed people, and a relatively small number of industries owned and run by outside investors, is that necessarily a disadvantage to us? First, let's get a general idea of how this situation came about.

A. Why is the North Country economically poor in relation to the rest of the Northeast? Three important reasons are:

1. Isolation from the original urban areas of the Northeast, which grew because of proximity to Europe, to certain natural resources and their routes of access, and to each other. Cities spawn cities; industry likes to concentrate itself, along with the workers and related services. Since the post-war boom, economic prosperity for an area has been practically synonymous with industrial development. I think this equation is becoming obsolete.
2. The milk monoculture which Cornell has encouraged, including the phasing-out of small grains and the repetition of corn plantings on the same plot of land for the purpose of immediate maximum "production," sacrificing quality for quantity and exhausting the soil of certain nutrients and micro-life. This all adds up to a strain on ecological balances, an addition of the soil and plants to fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, and a dis-use of the soil's natural fertility.
3. Our farmers must pay more than others in N.Y.S. for the fast-rising cost of transportation of grain and fertilizer from distant places, and the shipment of milk to distant markets. The former solution to this problem included local growing of small grains, and local small cheese enterprises, which once flourished here. Now most milk leaves the North Country in liquid form, and the remaining cheese industry is largely owned by a huge national corporation, Kraft. In the meantime, much food that could be grown locally is "imported" from distant fields. This includes many kinds of vegetables, grains, dry beans, fish (from stocked ponds) and poultry products, and sugar (honey and untapped maples).
4. The stockholders of the industries operating factories within our area (aluminum, paper, mining, etc.) live predominantly outside this area, so most company profits never get into our local economy.

B. This isolation and economic underdevelopment could be very beneficial to us, if we take a fresh look at where we might be headed. If we are to evolve into a more independent, self-contained, balanced community, where the individual citizen is less apathetic and realizes his or her actual power and creative capabilities, what existing resources might contribute toward that evolution?

1. Fertile land — our area's most basic resource, which we cannot allow to lay idle in the hands of speculators or wealthy city people building or buying second homes. We should encourage the thrifty farming of marginal farmland, finding suitable crops and methods, and putting greater emphasis on soil-conserving practices. Much of our poorly-drained and hilly land could be productive once again, with the application of better rotations, organic matter for soil porosity and stability, and an appropriate technology. By the latter term I do not mean a nostalgic return to 19th Century technology, but the use of smaller, lighter, more flexible machines like those being perfected in many foreign countries.
2. Farms are still basically small, family-run; many are barely surviving — how can they prosper when the whole orientation of agricultural research is toward agri-business, leading to the concentration of ownership of land among a few businessmen and most of the work to be done by landless, underpaid laborers? Fortunately, our farmers still have their integrity, originality, and a certain flexibility and ingenuity which comes from getting by on less. For example, many heat with wood from dead trees, repair and construct their own equipment and buildings, and make do with older machinery. Farmers who have taken the high-capital investment route are finding themselves locked into a high-pressure situation. Once they have three silos worth \$100,000 total, they have to keep them filled with corn, use monstrous machines to do it, and milk a large herd.
3. Cheap land, low taxes (relative to most of U.S.). This is helping to keep our farmers in business. This fact will become more significant, land being the most stable form of investment for speculators. The concept of land-ownership should change to "land-stewardship", for the earth cannot be owned, but can and should be used to provide food, shelter, and recreation for people, with some left wild to maintain the web of the ecosystem we all depend on.
4. The rural, traditional society and culture remain alive, especially among the poorer of us. People know and trust their neighbors and help them as an assumed and welcome duty. We have not yet felt a great impact from urban alienation and lack of trust, or from the sterility of suburbia.
5. The bulk of the non-agricultural section of our population is composed of blue-collar workers, small merchants, students, teachers, semi-employed laborers and odd-jobbers, and the jobless. The unifying characteristic of most of these people is that they have no great stake in the status quo of things. True, the high unemployment rate keeps them from making too much noise about pay and working conditions. (They have as an example of job-insecurity the incredibly unjust treatment of strikers at the Moongate Nursing Home.) But I'm talking about our people's general adaptability and flexibility, which gives me confidence in our community's potential for developing alternatives, economic and social. This quality allies the non-farmers with the farmers (cf. B.2.)

II. Institutions which are serving or might serve the growth of this vision of a unified, locally-oriented, environmentally-aware populace.

A. Existing institutions — for specific leaders, addresses, phone numbers, contact D.J. or A.C.

1. **Environmental Management Council** — an advisory body for the County Legislature; also helps educate the public on environmental issues. Some memberships are still vacant; contact your county legislator if you want to serve. Let's keep this Council citizen-oriented — don't allow the remaining places to be filled by big business spokesmen.
2. **U.P.S.E.T.** (Upstate People for Safe Energy Transmission) This group is trying to prevent the construction of a massive power line which will not serve our area and might be a great danger to our health and safety. Scenically a definite disaster.
3. **Akwesasne Notes** — A monthly newspaper of the Mohawk Nation, publicizing the Native American's efforts to regain their integrity, culture, equal rights, and some of the original lands of which they were stewards in the truest sense. Widely read in the U.S.
4. **Martin Sostre Defense Committee** — Local people working on problems of the prisons, courts, and legal system, to make them more responsible to the true needs of our society.
5. **Farmer's Markets** — In several towns of our county, these provide farmers, gardeners, and craftspeople a way to sell goods to their own neighbors, cutting out the middlemen who take their cut on most things we buy, while wasting fossil fuels in processing and transportation.
6. **Potsdam Consumer's Co-op and Canton Co-op** — Together with the Farmers' Markets, these provide a great potential threat to the corporate, chain store system owned by outside investors. A sign of this threat is the apparent desire by the Health Department to harrass the Potsdam Co-op, including an attempt to forbid the recycling of food containers. I am implying some sort of collusion of the chain stores and the Health Department at some level. The co-ops give us, the consumers, the power to eliminate the middlemen while controlling the quality of our food. And the farmer gets better prices.
7. **The communal farms** and other new homesteaders; the student co-operative houses — representing many of the principles embodied in this paper, with new experiments in soil husbandry, social forms, living styles.
8. **Potsdam Campus School** — a progressive learning atmosphere for kids, a chance for education students at Potsdam State to experiment with new concepts and methods of teaching.
9. **The Rootdrinker** — A literary and graphics publication tuned in to our natural and psychological environment.
10. **Environmental and rural studies programs** at local colleges; plus existing **student volunteer groups**. This is a great source of potential energy for improving the life of our community, if the right inspirations arise, contacts are made, projects initiated.
11. The various **government-funded agencies and services**, operating with different degrees of dedication and effect. Among the more beneficial to our county are the County Planning Board, the Upward Bound Program for educating high-school age Native Americans, and the Neighborhood Centers which help the poor with nutrition and housing.
12. **The adult education program** — valuable training in many skills.
13. **Others** which you know about and I don't — I welcome more information and correspondence. I am mainly a farmer and don't get around that much.

B. Institutions in the process of creation or as yet uncreated:

1. A **newsletter** centered around the evolution of a new, independent community. It could publish a "People's Yellow Pages" of alternative services and small merchants, and be a clearinghouse for all the organizations I'm listing.
2. A **library** of materials relating to "whole systems" and the growth of our new community: books and periodicals on land use, appropriate technology, alternative economics, energy sources, education, legal systems, etc.
3. An **expanded consumers' co-op** to further avoid middlemen in items such as tools, household necessities, hardware, and building supplies.
4. An **organic farmers' organization** to share ideas, equipment, marketing, bulk purchasing of seed and natural fertilizers.
5. A **legal aid society**, easily accessible to indigents and able to help them on cases of welfare rights, child custody, political harassment, etc. (to balance the power of those for whom the court system usually works: people with money and connections). I have information that a legal aid group is now trying to get funded in Potsdam.
6. A **paramedical group**, able to perform the traditional functions of midwives and country doctors, without the high fees of today's doctors.
7. A **free or open school** with its own building, certified teachers, and school board composed of parents and teachers.
8. **More-than-verbal arts and communications groups**: actor's guild, music club, visual arts group.
9. A **craft co-operative** with its own building and facilities: tools, kiln, looms, a sales shop, classes of instruction, and co-operative marketing in the big cities. An important solution to the seasonal nature of farming and other occupations.
10. A **cannery** to make the growing of vegetables and fruits more possible on a commercial scale — diversification for farmers; a way for home gardeners to provide a large share of their own winter food.

11. **Centers for spiritual exploration** and teaching, for those turned on to such things.
12. **More day-care centers**, perhaps in connection with the free school mentioned above.
13. **Alternative "employment agency"** or labor pool, to whom people can turn who want temporary jobs done: carpentry, painting, mechanics, haying, landscaping, tutoring, child-care. Wages could be worked out in terms of barter and employer's ability to pay. This could evolve into the 19th-Century custom of large group efforts, like house-raisin's, corn shuckin's, quilting bees.
14. **Revitalization of local Grange chapters**, now almost defunct, as centers of rural culture and sharing.
15. A **research collective** for studying whole systems and the technology appropriate to our unique situation: farm implement design, experimental agriculture, alternative energy sources, building methods, etc. It would possess its own labs eventually, but might have to begin through an expanding of the focus of existing college science departments, a re-orientation away from big technology.

IN SUMMARY

Recently I have heard the concept that a new "Fourth World" is beginning to arise, which could transcend and someday replace the other three worlds of the Eastern powers, the privileged in the West, and the "underdeveloped" or Third World, including our poor minorities at home.

In the Fourth World, the small community with individual cultural, geographical, and economic conditions, would be the fundamental social unit of humankind. Each locale would take from the culture and the economic systems of the three former "Worlds" those parts which fit their unique situation, inventing their own synthesis.

Each would have its own appropriate technology. Madison Avenue would not be confusing people's ideas of what they need for happy, full, meaningful lives. Most of what we need would come from our neighbors and within ourselves.

In fact, St. Lawrence County may be closer to the realization of this form of community than most other areas of the U.S., by the very fact of our youngness, the frontier atmosphere that still can be sensed. There is a lot of stagnation in the urban areas, a status quo being enforced by the powers-that-be. But we are potentially more flexible. The family farm is still our basic economic unit.

While much of the best farmland in Vermont and New Hampshire is quickly and haphazardly being transformed into golf courses and the idle acres of second homes, the North Country is still spared from that tragic phenomenon. And as fossil fuels grow in price, while food costs begin to take a larger percentage of people's budgets (bringing us more in line with the non-Western world), the small farmer may again prosper. Think about it — my optimism about the vanguard role possible for St. Lawrence County in the "Fourth World" may not seem too far-fetched.

P.S. I welcome comments and criticism on the opinions and information I have presented. And factual corrections, please!

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I'm surprised by the copy of the I Ching on the table, surprised because I had been thinking that I wanted to throw the coins and get a reading and somehow (in the zone of SOMEHOW all those things that happen by what is known as coincidence) here is that possibility right before my eyes, twenty after twelve on a rainy Thursday night. In case you don't know the I Ching or Book of Changes is an ancient Chinese oracle devise based on the Tao unity consisting of sixty-four possible hexagrams with appropriate commentary. You consult it by throwing three coins six times. One throw determines each line of your immediate hexagram. Operates on some cybernetic gestalt principle that your physical state at the moment contains a lot of information on ongoing processes and so can be tuned into and used as a future predicting devise. The I Ching tries to help this with it's laid back grassroots moral philosophy. A hexagram jumps from the chance fall of coins to the level of my perception where a voice speaks to me in a way that tells me to listen closer to myself. I don't abuse this type of thing and rarely consult this book but tonight I want to ask, How do We proceed? This is the Hexagram that came to view.



Ken/Keeping Still, Mountain  
THE JUDGEMENT  
KEEPING STILL. Keeping his back still  
so that he no longer feels his body  
he goes into his courtyard  
and does not see his people.  
No blame

Commentary on the Decision  
Keeping STILL-means stopping.  
When it is time to stop, then stop.  
When it is time to advance, then advance.  
Thus movement and rest do not miss the right time,  
And their course becomes bright and clear

Alan Casline