

RLA FORUM...

WHERE WE'VE BEEN & (MOSTLY)
WHERE WE'D LIKE TO GO



If you read the minutes of the last steering committee meeting above, you read about the origins of the "RLA Forum". It's sort of a free-for-all---a place for people to just jot down their ideas and/or build onto other people's ideas. Full-blown articles are wonderful, but often facing such a project is so discouraging (unless we're truly inspired that day) that the result is that it doesn't get finished--or started--and that gem of an idea never makes it to the newsletter.

Bill Sutkus' article falls within the realm of the "Forum" exchange, but because of its length, I decided to separate it out. Anyway, here goes. If this great kind of participation keeps up, we'll continue the "Forum" in the next newsletter.



The RLA, as I see it, can be a means for the individual becoming more independent by cooperative action. For instance, if one of the members is facing a crop harvest and he has no or little means, the RLA could provide help with machines or strong backs or whatever. A person thinking of building a barn needs help in raising it or he has no tin for the roof, and another has an old outbuilding falling down with a tin roof, etc.

The assistance may be of an informational sort. You have the need of a greenhouse and I know where to get cheap windows, heavy plastic or have blue prints or perhaps I have even built one myself and can tell you of my successes and failures.

Movies can be a great resource of how-to information, as well.

As for political direction, I feel that if we all unanimously agree on a political action, then and only then should we "put our banner" in support of a political what-have-you because we are, if nothing else, a collection of diverse individuals and at no time should we forget the individual's say.

These ideas require communication by all the members for our overall success. I believe that the newsletter should be supported by all of us for our own sake. Don't moan and groan. Listen...no one is going to know what you know or can help you or will know if you want to know something or need help until you tell them.

As far as, "I'm no writer," do you know how long it took me to even get around to writing this? So, if we're going to work together, helping each other, then we're going to have to communicate.

-- Roger Earl

* * * * *



(Jeannie turned this in at the Annual Meeting, as we had asked folks to put their thoughts in writing. Hers is the only response I saw besides Valerie Summer's, which was read aloud at the meeting. It seemed appropriate to include Jean's statement here.)

In order for the homesteaders' group to be beneficial to me (and hopefully there are others like me), it would have to break up occasionally into small interest groups which meet and serve some purpose. Such groups might be women, people interested in certain crafts, parents with small children, people with future plans meeting with others who "know the ropes" in a particular endeavor-sort of a workshop.

I am not especially interested in finding out what homesteading means. It seems, from the directory, that there are quite a few members who either live in town or who have relatively few "homesteading" activities. Couldn't we simply call ourselves a cooperative society for people who have an interest in the land and what it can produce.

-- Jean Dawson

* * * * *

I would like to see the main focus of the group at this time be to help members attain some basic goals in standards of living: 1) that we all have enough good quality food; 2) that we have sufficient housing and domestic comforts by efficient means, and 3) that we have a good working program by individuals (as all these must be approached) in making part or all of our income at home (this one may or may not be for people that have outside careers).

I would like to see the social gatherings mostly being centered on these activities. I would be disappointed to see too much time spent around purely social activities at first. I do feel socializing is important and there would be more room for it as our lives were more secure.

I hope this is of some use. If I felt that these ideas had some support, I could be more specific.

-- Ross Kosten

* * * * *

May 24, 1983

Dear Valerie,

Bill Sutkus called yesterday and asked for some information for the newsletter. With the "writer" in our house away for the week, I'm afraid that about all I can offer you are the ideas we discussed. Hope you can use them somehow.

The first thing we had discussed was co-operative work efforts by the members. It seems that even the hardest jobs go faster and smoother when there are others to help with it. In fact, as a result of the meeting, Carl and Ross Kosten have already helped each other out with some clearing and fencing, and Carl is trying to get some people together for a fencing party on June 4th so we can get some of our land fenced.

Another thing we talked about was having get togethers more often, not only for business purposes, but to share our experiences.

I'm sure there's a lot of lessons various members have learned and mistakes made that could benefit others and keep them from making the same ones.

Finally, we felt that a moderate amount of publicity about the group and its purposes wouldn't be a bad idea. It took us three years of living in the area before we found out about the group. We might still be unaware of it if Carl hadn't gone out to Bill MacKentley's to order some trees.

I'm not sure if this is what you wanted, but I hope it helps.

SALAD BURNET *Sanguisorba minor*

Sincerely,

Joyce Bickel

* * * * *



This issue of the newsletter is the product of the efforts and input by at least twenty(!) of our members. To say that this pleases me is putting it a bit mildly. I'm very pleased, ecstatic--that is to say, tickled pink. In the light of all our talk about new beginnings and increasing member involvement, I'd say this is a very good sign.

One thing--positive, I think--that happened with this newsletter was that, rather than a single individual taking on the task of reporting all the ideas that were brought up at the steering committee meeting or everything that was discussed at the women's meeting, several individuals agreed to write up their own ideas or some of the things that particularly struck them. Thus, the "RLA Forum" and the notes on the women's meeting give, perhaps in some ways, even a better idea of what really went on than one person's understandably limited perspective.

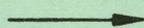
Not only that, these smaller, more personal pieces are less intimidating tasks to take on and take less time. This allows more people the chance to participate.

Finally, and most important, hearing all these people's voices as I read the newsletter makes it a much warmer, more interesting and personal form of communication. In fact, I think it communicates more. I hope it's the start of a trend because it's getting at what, to me, is most important about RLA/NFC.

The practical aspects of the group are great--workshops; labor and skill exchanges; and cooperative business ventures. I'm not into full-scale "homesteading" yet, but I do appreciate the examples and support of people who already are. So, yes, I think those things are important and I'm glad they're part of what RLA is about.

The large get-togethers are nice, too. They're fun. The kids have a great time. The food is good, and the films usually are, too.

But for me the best part of all this is the opportunity to make contact with people I would never see--maybe never even meet otherwise. Through the smaller meetings and discussions that come out of the larger group and through working on the newsletter I get to spend a couple of hours with a dynamic woman like Liz Scarlett and



maybe get her to "practice" a relaxation technique or two on me. I get to learn from and draw on the organizing experience of people like Bill and Carol Sutkus. I get to spend an enjoyable evening with folks like Jill and Roger Earl (even though I still haven't written it up for the newsletter). Now when would I ever have met any of these people, who live thirty miles away from me in various directions, if not for the NFC/RLA? I've met and become friends with people whose lives and backgrounds are so different from mine and yet, some strong common (interest, value, vision??--I think the difficulty in putting our fingers on this intangible is what always stymies our discussions about what our group goals are and what our name should be) brings us together in this organization. Would we have connected otherwise?

A wider community in the North Country--beyond work contacts and immediate neighbors--is what I value most about RLA and the spiritual, if you will, support that community engenders. Not that I've taken advantage of it or contributed to it nearly as much as I might have, but the potential for it is, I think, a very powerful thing. I think we're all going to continue to need it and be grateful for it.

WILD GINGER

-- Valerie Ingram

* * * * *

AND SOME LAST MINUTE ADDITIONS TO THE "FORUM"...

* * * * *



Bill Sutkus buried this idea in a letter to me about another project RLA might engage in--more formal support for new homesteaders moving into the county. He suggested perhaps a written statement that we could distribute to Cooperative Extension and to real estate agents explaining our organization and the support available for homesteaders along with the information, resources, etc. we've in hand. We might work up a list of our member homesteaders who might be willing to act as a kind of "big brother/sister" for new folks.

* * * * *

Ross Kosten and various other folks have tossed around the idea of self-insurance or our group acting as its own insurance company. I'm sure the actual doing of such a project would require complex research and planning. However, it does seem worthy of further consideration.

Bryan Lee and I discussed this at a potluck brunch at Anne Vinyard's on Memorial Day. I commented that as an alternative to insurance on a cash basis, members in a group such as ours might enter into an agreement with one another to work together to replace a building lost to fire, wind, etc.--something like what the Amish do.

Noting that a shortage of cash is the status quo for most of us, Bryan expanded on my thought by suggesting having a policy with a regular insurance company for the value of the materials only in tandem with a "policy" with RLA for labor and use of tools.

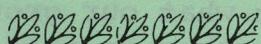
It seemed to us that we might be good risks for one another for two reasons. First, Bryan felt that homesteaders, in general, are a careful group. Second, we felt there might be a different ethic involved if we knew that our friends' resources were on the line rather than some big national corporation. Knowing that Ross' and Bryan's limited funds, rather than Allstate's, would have to pay



for a foolish error on my part might keep me just that critical tad more alert. (We're not suggesting anyone would intentionally burn out, just a subconscious subtle difference in attitude.)

These were just thoughts casually exchanged on a rainy-turned-sunny lazy morning. But we're supposed to be sharing and communicating with the larger RLA community, right? So here are our ramblings.

-- Valerie Ingram



CABBAGE ROOT MAGGOTS

...AN UPDATE

Two years ago I wrote in this newsletter about my various attempts and theories for dealing with root maggots (the cause of mysterious wilting and wasting of cabbage family seedlings in early June in many of our gardens). I had consulted scientific papers, tried home remedies, but continued to watch 1/3 to 1/2 of our cauliflower and broccoli bite the dust, their roots crawling with those cursed white maggots. I even killed a hefty stretch of seedling nursery bed by overdosing with a half-inch layer of wood ashes (one of the recommended remedies), only to dig up the dying plants and find maggots merrily feasting in what must have been a very alkaline environment (ashes + water = lye).

Ironically, the answer was right under my nose. It was almost too simple. It involves a knowledge of their life cycle and a bit of crawling around on knees and elbows.

In our climate, this pernicious insect overwinters in the soil as a pupa (fattened on your fall broccoli and rutabaga crops). After a certain number of degree days of spring warmth have occurred, the adult flies emerge (generally from May 15 to May 20 around here). They spend a couple days revving up their ovaries, and then for about two or three weeks, they seek out wild and cultivated members of the mustard family (cauliflower seems to be a favorite, radishes, too). They then "ovaposit" their eggs right next to the stems of the victim plants. The eggs hatch in 4-6 days, depending on temperatures. The maggots (larvae) crawl down the stem and chew up the roots. Soon you notice the plants wilting on sunny days and turning weird colors.

The larvae will eventually pupate, yielding one or two more cycles later on, in July and August, but these usually go unnoticed (except for those ugly grooves on your turnips). The populations are lower, supposedly due to hotter, drier conditions (pupae go dormant), and sometimes due to predators (a certain "rove beetle" which unfortunately attacks only the pupae, after the larvae have already taken their toll on your spring seedlings.) Also, most of your brassica plants will be large enough to barely be affected by a few root maggots.

With the aid of rain or irrigation, you can save some plants by piling soil up around them so they can grow new roots along the stem. A meager harvest is all you can expect. But why confine yourself to rescue attempts, when there are simple preventative measures? Here are three that I use:

