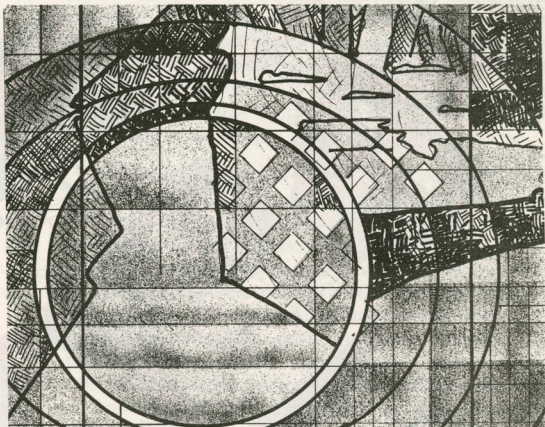


On April Fool's weekend of 1979, nearly 125 people from every part of New York State gathered for a conference entitled: *New York State Agriculture and Food Supply: Organizing for Self Reliance*. The conference was held at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse and consisted of 24 workshops, three speakers, several films, natural food meal service, and a square dance.

The primary concern motivating the gathering was that New York State is importing nearly 90% of its total food supply, and an equal share of its energy. This condition leaves us vulnerable to shortages and price manipulations, thereby decreasing our true measure of freedom and independence. This imbalance in net imports is but the most critical sign of the perilous situation now confronting our New York State communities. Additionally, we are confronting today an interlocking complex of declining food quality, the increase of nutritionally related and degenerative diseases, an emphasis on pharmaceutical medicine, the displacement of small and family farms by large scale corporate agribusiness, the replacement of local economies of production and supply by national and multinational systems, the chemical and biological sterilization and erosion of topsoil, the loss of prime farmlands to commercial and housing developments, the consolidation of food processing and marketing into a few corporations, an increasingly artificial way of life, and so much more... The seriousness of our predicament was brought home to us by the wind blowing from the south all that weekend from a runaway nuclear reactor in southern Pennsylvania.

The conference was intended as a gathering of grassroots activists and community organizers, and was structured to maximize opportunities for participants to share experiences, and to ask questions about alternatives to the dominant food systems. It was hoped this information and action exchange would further stimulate the development of self reliant food programs and strategies to reverse the accelerating spiral of the deterioration of our native foods supply. The 125 people who participated in the two days of discussions represented a tremendous diversity of backgrounds: small farmers, coop members and organizers, organic food distributors, solar enthusiasts, gardeners, folklorists, nutritionists, university staff, small business entrepreneurs, nursing mothers, ag students, government staff, and more. Mostly they were farmers and people concerned with farming and rural life. It was disappointing not to have more participation from urban consumer and community groups, and from local governmental agencies. Everyone who attended found the weekend inspiring, educational and more than worth \$25 and two nights away from home in the downwind shadow of a potential radioactive cloud.

Late Sunday afternoon at the Public Education and Regional Communication workshop, a handful of people discussed future organizing efforts. In the fading light of a successful conference, it was clear that a grassroots self reliance movement was alive and growing in New York State. It is imperative to nurture that young movement and continue the work begun by the conference. In an expression of commitment to that endeavor, the workshop participants formed the New York State Coalition for Local Self Reliance. The concerns of the Coalition go beyond merely food, and include energy, technology, ecological resources management, small farming, land ownership, shelter and housing, appropriate technology, land use, and any other topic which bears on the problems of human settlement and inhabitation of the Earth. Specifically, the purposes for which this Coalition is formed include:



- 1) to be a voice for self reliance which defines and expresses the issues and concerns of the self reliance movement, in order to promote the increased awareness of the public, government, industry, agriculture, and commerce;
- 2) to provide greater visibility to existing projects which demonstrate effective application of self reliance principles and philosophy and organization at local, regional and state levels;
- 3) to create a context which supports the evolution of fundamental self reliance at the level of individual orientation and community organization by encouraging educational and informational programs and literature intended to elicit and align the participation of a broad spectrum of individuals, government and the economic sector;

4) to provide events and forums through which individuals and organizations in the New York State self reliance movement can participate in the discussion, sharing, research, and mutual education necessary to crossfertilize and expand our understanding of self reliance principles and practices. This would include an annual statewide conference in the spring, a series of regional conferences in the fall and winter, public speakers, panel discussions, fairs, special workshops, articles, news releases, etc.

5) to develop and facilitate open access to the resources and information services necessary to nourish the New York State self reliance movement, including an information clearinghouse, an access directory compiled of profiles of New York State self reliance projects, organizations, government and private agencies, and other coordinate groups, a directory of self reliance tools, resources, technical services, media contacts, and needs;

6) to focalize the formation of a stable infrastructure through which relevant and specific alternatives can be established and interrelated. The Coalition will meet monthly on the last Friday of each month, and invites other individuals to participate in this opportunity for expanded mutual awareness and statewide coordination. We are already developing a communications network which can interconnect the many

existing local projects and networks, and precipitate regional coalitions. Our long term goal is to catalyze statewide alliances representative of interest groups operating at the grassroots level to rebuild rational, ecological, self reliant lifestyles, economies, institutions, cultures and communities in New York State.

7) to obtain the funding, in the form of grants, loans, venture capital, investments, tax regulations, credit unions, endowments, and other such technical and financial services, necessary to finance a self reliance economy and resources management system;

8) and, lastly, to encourage each individual to eat less and chew well, consume less, conserve more and waste nothing in a sincere and conscious effort to be more self reliant, healthy, happy, and free.

For further information about the New York State Coalition for Local Self-Reliance, write P.O. Box 6222, Syracuse, New York 13217.

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