

It's no secret that I love farming. The whole question of land use intrigues me, from forestry and pasture management to the various horticulture techniques for different crops. These days it's the middle part, making compost and soil preparation that I enjoy focusing on.

Owning land is a responsibility. Tennessee was woodland until we cleared the forest for our crops and animals. This was done without machines; our grand fathers used crosscut saws and grubbing hoes to make field. If we aren't going to tend the fields they ought to be left to grow back into woods.

Open land is pleasant to live around, but it requires proper care. Overgrazing can be detrimental, but so can under grazing. Grassland needs occasional animal impact to remain healthy. Otherwise, biological activity decreases, plants and their roots become stunted, and we are only using a fraction of the sun energy that could be turning carbon into sugar, starches and carbohydrates. Soils can improve with the alteration of animal impact and they rest from the livestock.

A major shift in land use occurred in my lifetime. Animals were removed from farmland into an unhealthy concentration in feedlots and pasture was abandoned to be bush hogged every now and then. Most of America's food is imported and the farms are uncared for.

A new shift is happening. People want better quality local food and they feel the need to better care for the land that's been entrusted to them.

But a lot of the practical, good farming knowledge has been lost. There is a lot of confusion. Between the chemical method and the many new "organic" methods, it's hard for a young, non-farmer to figure out how to grow food.

I help get four new gardens going near Nashville this spring. Consequently, I've been offered land to start more gardens, to graze animals and generally manage. Sometime I think I am the only person who knows about cow manure, compost and farm-all tractor; it seems so simple to me. Our farm here is still going strong.

Hundreds of people have visited the new gardens at Bells Bend. Public biodynamic gardens are a great way to show local food production methods, along with providing healthy vegetables to the community. I envision hundreds of them, creating thousands of jobs and feeding a million people, within a few years.

To do this we will have to restock our farms with animals and put a high priority on taking care of their manure. Deer fences are required to keep the state of Tennessee's deer out of the gardens, and young folks will have to learn how to make good compost, herd cattle and drive tractors. We need to use our land.