Dad had a table at the end of our driveway where we offered vegetables for sale. A shoebox collected the money that folks would leave when they got their corn, beans, or whatever. It was the honor system. When questioned about people taking without paying, Dad just shrugged his shoulders and said they probably needed it more than anyone else anyway. All were our neighbors, and the farm had community support.

That was in the 1960's. By the 70's I had my own farm and started selling organic produce. When I took produce somewhere, it was best not to mention the "organic" word. It implied buggy, less-than-perfect vegetables, grown by hippies.

I desired many things that have since happened which now I'm not so sure about. In the early 80's the United States had about 4,000 organic farmers who did their own on farm organic research, developed organic markets and organized organic farming conferences. It was a lot to do, besides our farm work.

We longed for funding to do these things, but our government was on a different path. We wanted higher prices, plenty of farmers' markets, and a rising demand. Now the times have changed, and so have my ideas.

Our government owns the word "organic", and colleges do government-sponsored research, none of it applicable to a small, old-timey farm. It's mostly product-oriented research. We don't want to buy stuff just to grow vegetables. The money they are throwing at research, marketing and conferences is astounding, but not very useful. I guess we should have predicted this. The non-government sponsored conferences are a lot more fun.

Although our farm was certified organic 15 years, we can't call it organic anymore because it's not government inspected. Oh well, I dropped my certification in 2002, when they got involved. We've sold it without the word before, and now we get to again.

You would think I'd be grateful for high prices, the proliferation of farmers' markets, and the rising demand. But all of these trends are a part of the present food distribution system which I now feel needs a fundamental change. You don't solve a problem with the same thinking that created it.

Everyone ought to have access to fresh farm vegetables everyday. They are not just for people with money. The prices in an organic store are scary. My experience has been that the longer I farm organically, the less cost I have in producing food. Something fishy is going on.

Farming and marketing are two fundamentally different occupations. Growing food uses the forces of nature to produce new goods each year. Marketing is a human activity that uses up the farm's production. It's clear to me that food is free; it is a direct result of human labor interacting with the land and animals. The high prices come from the marketing, which is all of the transportation, advertising, packaging and overhead to run the stores.

A farmers' market seems like a good idea, so that there are no middlemen. But the farmer's role is on the farm. With less than 1% of the population, farmers don't need to be running around trying to sell stuff. They overproduce and mess up the markets. A few of the other 99% can market much better than us farmers can.

Farms need support for a wide variety of reasons besides vegetable production. Good farming is good for the environment, air quality, conservation, recreation, rural preservation, the beautiful scenery, education, inspiration and community building. A rising demand for good farming is beneficial, but a rising demand just for "organic" produce could lead us into trouble. "Organic" farming does not necessarily mean good farming to me anymore.

What excites me now is community-supported agriculture, where a group of people takes responsibility for a farm in exchange for produce. Our coop gives money, and we run a farm. We cut hay, move cattle around, take care of wood lots, lime pastures, plant orchards and all kinds of activities besides growing vegetables. It requires very long-term thinking. The farm, not monetary concerns, guides my planning. I limed this year for better hay next year, to feed the cattle the following year, to make compost, which isn't used until the year after that, which fertilizes soil for many years later. I'm using their money to get the soil ready four or five years from now. The vegetables I have now are free and need to be eaten before they go bad.

This week we sent in plenty of the following vegetables for about 200 people: potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, sweet dumpling squash, delicatta squash, butternuts, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, rhubarb, heads of lettuce, and bok choy, apples, pears, swiss chard, kale, mustard greens, turnips with greens, celery, parsley, mizuna, arugula, and a little thyme and sage. All of this is easy to grow with a bit of labor, and the farm's hay, animal manures and tractors. A garden needs a farm, and a farm needs community support.

We always have excess, which we offer to neighbors or donate to charities. I don’t feel like I sell produce anymore, I am paid to run a whole farm. We don’t want government funding, high prices, farmer’s markets or a rising demand. All we need is love, mouths to feed and community support.