Dark clouds have a silver lining, and there is a bright side to everything. As gas prices rise, so does the cost of produce grown elsewhere. The demand for locally grown food dwarfs the supply, especially if the fertilizer has been cow manure. For the first time in my short farming career (35 years), the prospects for the small organic farmer are blooming.

High gas prices are no surprise; our president and his administration are oilmen. I've often joked that I'd like a president who was an organic farmer, so that produce prices would rise. I don't think it was planned, but high fuel prices have helped create enormous possibilities for local farmers.

The costs of many of the products needed for commercial farming are directly related to the cost of fuel, besides just the transportation. Organic production simply requires less oil. Fertilizers, pesticides and herbicide are all petroleum-based products.

People are wanting to eat healthier food, too. A growing concern about chemicals has led to the increased demand for organic food. The environment has suffered from commercial agriculture, and people are upset with groundwater pollution, the over use of poisons, and the awful smell and practices involved in confinement animal operations.

In contrast, our farm doesn't need chemicals and poisons, and keeps 200 families happy with organic produce. With a heard of cows and a Farmall tractor, we row crop vegetables similar to the way Macon County used to grow tobacco and other crops. The independent, small farmer can now see the light at the end of the long, dark tunnel that cheap fuel temporarily created in agriculture. No longer is the motto "Get big or get out", but "Get small and get in".

Tourists love to stop by and look at our gardens. So do local folks. It's encouraging how many people are realizing the importance and beauty of the small organic farm. Nashville has enough hungry eaters to support hundreds of farms like ours, and Macon County has the land.

We haven't raised our prices in 20 years. The cost of transporting our food to Nashville each week has doubled, from $20 to $40, but our farm can eat that extra $20. I like to think I can stop inflation. The local small farmer will control the economy. When gas is $10 a gallon, Macon County can again have thriving, rural community. With our natural resources – clean water, healthy forests, good soil and great people – the future looks bright.