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Current Issue: **Sustainable Local Agriculture /Locally Grown**

In recent years a strong movement has emerged to redefine agriculture from the perspective of its sustainability (ability to be productively replicated in future generations) and its interconnection with its immediate environment. The movement has brought focus not only to these connections but to the profitability of small farms, the practicality of individuals growing their own food, and the environmental and economic benefits of obtaining food that has been produced locally.

According to the 1990 U.S. Farm Bill, sustainable agriculture should hold to these basic tenets:

• satisfy human food and fiber needs and farmers and ranchers profit over the long term
• enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends
• make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate natural biological cycles and controls
• sustain the economic viability of farm operations
• enhance the quality of life for farmers, ranchers and society as a whole

Although the farm has long been a place where much thought has been given to stewardship of the earth, it has also been a battleground of principles where large scale economies often fight for position in front of solid conservation practices. While food and fiber production has soared due to new technologies, mechanization, increased chemical use, specialization, and government policies that favored maximizing production, there have been significant environmental and social costs. Prominent among these are topsoil depletion, groundwater contamination, decline of family farms, increasing production costs, intensified use of fossil fuel sources, and degradation of economic and social conditions in rural communities. The growing sustainable agriculture movement of the last two decades has focused on methodologiesthat address these concerns without damaging the economic viability of the farm

According to the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program at U. Cal-Davis, basic operational core practices of the movement should include :

• Selection of species and varieties that are well suited to the site and to conditions on the farm;
• Diversification of crops (including livestock) and cultural practices to enhance the biological and economic stability of the farm;
• Management of the soil to enhance and protect soil quality;
• Efficient and humane use of inputs; and
• Consideration of farmers' goals and lifestyle choices.

Examples of specific practices that fit within this framework include but are definitely not limited to): recycling/composting yard and kitchen waste, polycultural farming, square foot gardening, seed saving/use of heirloom varieties,rainwater management practices (rain barrels, cisterns, rain gardens, etc.),vertical gardening,animal husbandry practices (small paddock rotational grazing, backyard chickens, Serengeti rotational grazing, etc.), integrated pest management, and best practices from organic agriculture. The way that crops are sold must also be accounted for in relation to sustainability. Food sold locally saves transportation energy (including consumers) whereas food that is sold at a remote location, involves a different and higher set of energy costs for materials, labor, and transport.

Sustainability rests on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While this can possibly be done with large scale operations, the focus of this topic will address smaller scale, family farm level operations