

ABUNDANCE FARM

*How We Plan
to Put our Resources to Work
and Live our Dreams
in Panama*

A Short Book for Our Friends and Family
by Peter Christopher and Scott Devine

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Preface to the Project

Scott and I met several years ago through a mutual friend. However, it wasn't until six months ago that we spent more than a few hours together. What we found when we participated together in the 2003 Creating Human Community retreat was that we each had a dream we wanted to pursue, that our dreams fit well together, and that we got along well with each other. Although many other people have also been involved with us on and off over the past year in developing the vision for Abundance Farm, most of them are not yet ready or not aligned closely enough to make the jump with us.

Scott and I have spent half of the past six months together. Half of our time together was in the US, and half on site researching Central America countries as potential sites for our project. When we completed the first leg of our site research together last month, we decided to set down in writing our vision for what we would like to create. Hence, this book.

Our dream is to live sustainably and harmoniously. Our dream is to have balanced lifestyles, including thinking, learning, teaching, working, writing, playing music, and childraising. Our dream is to have free time every day to spend in a beautiful place on earth we call home. Our dream is to understand our resource use and keep that resource use at a level with which we are comfortable. Our dream is to engage with technology and commodity consumption without becoming enslaved to technology or commodities or consumption. Our dream is to have regular interactions with a mix of old friends and new friends from around the world. Our dream is to participate in the development of global consciousness and the factors that support peaceful coexistence. Our dream is to grow and eat healthy food.

After many years of formal education and informal research, we are ready to create a place to live this dream. We have decided to do this by buying land in Panama and starting an agricultural and peace center called Abundance Farm (Finca Abundancia in Spanish).

Our dream is to get started. We give birth to this book, as we move into the world of living this version of our dreams.

Peter Christopher
Portland, Oregon
May, 2004

Introduction to the Book

Our goal in writing this book is to illustrate for ourselves and others our vision for Abundance Farm. We recognize that reality may diverge from our vision, but we don't consider that a sufficient reason not to write down our vision as we now see it. Indeed, we are even tickled by the possibility that this short book could help others to become part of the realization and modification of our vision.

We have categorized our writings into several main sections plus appendices. The main sections detail economic and legal plans, residency agreements, lifestyle considerations, and the reasoning for why we chose Panama. There is also a short section on the rationale and plans for the international exchange programs we plan to offer.

The appendices provide background history, philosophy, narratives, and practical supporting information. This includes descriptions of how this project fits into each of our personal histories, a prospective budget and timeline, fictional "narratives" describing future perspectives on Abundance Farm from the point of view of potential collaborators, and several philosophical writings illustrating our general worldview.

We have collaborated on the production of this book and jointly take responsibility for what it contains. Scott is the primary author for the section on ecology in the appendix. Peter is the primary author for the remainder.

Concerning language, we have chosen in this document to use the word "resident" and "project" rather than "member" and "community". We also use "project" to refer to the physical farm we intend to create, whereas "book" refers to the current document.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to our families and friends and teachers who have encouraged us and supported us. Thank you to the Devines and the Kaweckis (Peter's family).

We are also appreciative of those who have offered us feedback and contributions as we have developed our vision over the past six months: Ryan Grant, Anita Loomis, Aaron Godwin, Hudson Cress, Samantha Moller, Adina Gordon, Jerry Mintz, Guy Johnson, Meli Chang-Turpen, Joseph Lawrence, Lydia Petty, Vincent Hedger, Arnold Greenberg, Nanci Kuykendall, Kim Martin, Aric Spencer, Leah Calo, Daniel Lipton, Saowanee Sangkara, Vanessa DiDomenico, Laura Zanini, Chris Fitz, Andy Tarter, Dina Bueford, Galina Shavard, Jon Jonakin, Joel Gruver, Amy Stein, Ben Stein, Gilberto Alamencia, Ratibor Hartmann, Alexander Hartmann, Ron Mooney, Larry Robertson, Janet Lee, Glenn Lee, Anne Fazioli, Andrew Rasmussen, Morgan Ervin, Mara Madden, Rimmy Malhotra, Heart Akerson.

And finally, much thanks to those brave souls who have already been living their own version of the cooperative lifestyle dream. Thanks for conversing with us about your adventures and giving us food and shelter on our recent journey – at The Farm, Zendik Farm, Punta Mona, Pacha Mama, Cascada Verde, The Peace Farm, Finca Ipe, Longo Mai, Durika, Ecoforest, Falcon Blanco, Earthaven, Ganas, Finca Buena Vida.

Project Overview

1. To develop a place where work and play are in balance and enjoyed; where basic needs are met with local resources when reasonable; where democratic education is practiced to develop curiosity, engagement with the world, and a life-long learning habit; where international exchanges occur for the goal of global harmony; and where honesty and kindness are supremely valued.

2. To research and develop psychology, knowledge, and practices that are necessary to socially and ecologically sustainable lifestyles.

Abundance Farm will grow slowly over 10-20 years to a maximum size of 50-100 permanent residents, plus 50-75 temporary residents. These residents will be from many countries of the world and will include a wide distribution of ages.

The initial land purchase for Abundance Farm will be 30-200 acres in 2004-2005, to be followed by additional purchases in coming years to a final size of approximately 1000 acres. About one third of the land will be used for agricultural production, one third for developing residences, businesses and common facilities, and one third retained for conservation.

Abundance Farm will aim to produce 75% or more of its food, materials for housing, and energy on site.

Temporary residents will arrange visits through informal and formal programs, living and working alongside permanent residents. These temporary residents will not be paying for their time at the farm. Rather, they will exchange labor for room and board, just like permanent residents. Our international exchange programs will be deliberate outreach efforts to bring foreign guests from diverse countries together at Abundance Farm to improve their English, to learn about global culture and sustainability, and to live happily alongside us for a period of a month to a year.

Investors will fund initial land purchases and provide capital for developing residences and businesses at Abundance Farm. Some investors may be residents at the farm, some may be foundations, and some may be friends. This structure provides an opportunity for persons of means to be personally connected to the ways their resources are employed and, in particular, to have these resources provide not only financial dividends, but progress towards sustainability and human unity.

Income from businesses will fund operating expenses and capital repairs, and possibly contribute towards land purchase and capital improvements.

If you would like to become involved, you can visit our website at abundancefarm.com. Project updates, contact information, and relevant links will be available there.

Economic and Legal Structure

Economic Goals

- Give investors (some or all of whom may be residents) a way to invest that supports the values of sustainability, human unity, and happiness
- Give investors return on investment and procedures for liquidity that match their investment criteria
- Allow visitors and new residents to visit and stay without paying money
- Have Abundance Farm businesses cover the operating expenses, as opposed to jobs or investments outside the farm
- Have capital available either from the Abundance Farm operating budget or from external sources for starting businesses, building facilities/dwellings, and making other land improvements such as planting trees and installing irrigation
- Ensure that residents cover operating budget through the Daily Minimum Work Requirement (DMWR), which should not total more than 40 hours per week (preferably 20 hours per week)
- Reward residents in relation to their contributions, allowing personal income from overtime labor above the DMWR
- Make use of the efficiency of shared resources when reasonable, including physical resources such as libraries, personal time such as group meals, and cost sharing such as medical emergencies.
- Administer so that expenses incurred for the pleasure of individuals or a subset of the residents shall be born by those making the choice (e.g. having children, travel, luxuries not provided by the operating budget)
- Allow for a diversity of lifestyles (including work and consumption levels and amount of personal space) but focus the main project on an environmental and social lifestyle that is fair in the sense of Kant's Categorical Imperative applied to global economics and ecology (behave as if everyone would act just like you do)
- Conserve some land in its natural state

Types of Investments

We plan to remain open to fixed-income loans and equity investments, although we expect that the initial land purchase will be based entirely on equity.

Traditionally, loans have a fixed rate of return and schedule for repayment and are

often collateralized with assets such as mortgages on property, whereas equity does not have a fixed rate of return or a schedule for repayment. In exchange for the drawbacks of not having a fixed rate of return or a certain method for repayment, equity usually has the additional benefits of greater control over the use of the assets and the possibility for a larger economic return.

At times, Abundance Farm will have a clearer idea of future income and may prefer loans. At other times, future income could be uncertain (as at the time of founding). Individuals may also have preferences based on their risk tolerance, investment horizon, and outside obligations. In consideration of this, we expect our preferred type of investments to vary over time.

One type of arrangement at a well-known intentional community called Twin Oaks, is to strive for an egalitarian arrangement for members. Twin Oaks requires members either to contribute the annual income from their assets to the community income or to hand over their assets as zero-interest loans to the community. We are not pursuing this avenue. In the future, we may be open to arrangements like at Twin Oaks, but at least in the initial stage of Abundance Farm, we will not have a sufficient base of equity to guarantee loan repayments. We expect that at least 50% of the assets of the farm will be equity investments, with the remainder as loans at founding and throughout the life of Abundance Farm.

There is one other option worthy of note: *gifts*. The land and capital startup costs of the farm could be partially financed by gifts. These could be made either directly to the farm (not tax-deductible) or as contributions to a separate nonprofit entity (tax-deductible), which could then either purchase equity or loan money (note the section on foundations in the Partner listing of the Appendix). The farm will also accept gifts for expenses incurred in the transportation and legal aspects of the international exchange program. But the farm will not accept gifts for general operating expenses or capital repairs.

Investment Liquidity

We expect that investors will want to withdraw their investments from time to time. If they are residents, this might occur when they want to relocate elsewhere in the world. We would like to retain the standard corporate avenues for this withdrawal of equity investment. Equity and loans will be transferable to residents, nonresidents, or back to Abundance Farm itself. We would like for the purchase and sale prices of equity over time to match the value of the underlying assets. In the event of a lack of cash at the farm when an investor would like to withdraw an investment, we may be able to offer part of the land as a subdivision in lieu of cash. In general, however, we expect to be able to buy out investor shares at a fair price with cash within one year of any investor expressing an interest in redeeming shares. In some cases, these repurchases will be funded with cash on hand, and in other through sales of equity or issuance of loans to outside investors.

If the farm at some points has extra cash on hand and nothing to do with it, it is possible the corporation could pay a cash dividend to its shareholders. We do not, however, anticipate such an event in the near future.

Loans also have their own repayment terms in addition to being transferable.

Legal Structure

Taking our goals as a basis, we have chosen a general structure of a for-profit corporation to hold the assets of Abundance Farm. Some of these details of the structure depend on the country in which we incorporate, which at the moment is planned as Panama. One country (or state) may have condominium laws that provide advantages over the corporate structure. Another country may have no condominium laws but favorable laws for general corporations. We have not yet researched these details in Panama, although we have been in touch with several individuals who think Abundance Farm can work in the form of a Panamanian corporation.

Internal Roles, Titles, and Process

Who will have formal authority? The details of the legal structure again depend on what is available in the country where we settle. We expect Abundance Farm to have a corporate board of directors. We expect the shareholders will elect the board of directors annually, and that the board of directors will appoint the officers of the corporation (the president, secretary, and treasurer), who will formally be in charge of running the day-to-day operations of the farm. When the core group requests to take over any operational task with a reasonable method, the official corporation will transfer its responsibility. As long as the core group continues to carry out these responsibilities, the corporation and its officers will not interfere. We predict that most of the administrative tasks will be handled through various subgroups like a “kitchen committee” or through specific roles like a “tree nursery manager”, none of which will be formalized in the corporate bylaws. Among the responsibilities the residents will likely take on is the formation of residency agreements. We predict that the core residents will vote democratically on management decisions, such as the rights and responsibilities of residency, and delegation of tasks to particular individuals.

The legal entity, however, will be ultimately responsible for the use of its resources, and as such, the board of directors, acting through the officers of the corporation, will have the responsibility to evaluate the decisions of the core group and, if deemed necessary (hopefully never), the right to override the core group’s decisions.

We will strive to find responsibilities that individual people find pleasurable and in which they are capable. If we have important work that none of the capable people want to do, those responsibilities may end up being given more labor credit. In general, we’d like to use an auction system where every person bids the lowest amount of labor credit they would accept to do a particular job (per piece or per hour or per year depending on the job). Such an auction system would take place at frequent meetings that address the work that needs to be done. Some businesses and activities will eventually have their own work meetings.

Within the everyday operation of the farm, we expect to keep an experimental mindset, trying out alternatives and using what works best. This experimental attitude will apply to types of meeting processes and even types of leadership (for instance, rotating roles on a weekly basis).

Industries

One of our core values is that we want to be a working farm and not an educational facility. Certainly, education happens at a working farm and working happens at an educational facility, but ours will be based on the production of goods and the provision of non-teaching services. We don't want to have workshops on personal development, agriculture, or lifestyle by which we earn income in exchange for sharing information or handing out certificates or degrees. We want to earn income by providing useful goods and valuable, non-teaching services to the wider world. (Sometimes it even seems that the value of the education received is inversely proportional to the amount the instructor is paid.) When we do have learning activities, we will pay our instructors nothing. See the list of business ideas in the appendix for specific possibilities. We plan to have some businesses that are able to use unskilled labor, so that our short-term residents can be productive. We also plan to have seasonal and temporary labor possibilities, for residents who choose to work many intensely (saving up work credit), then take time off without work.

Residency Agreements and Dwelling Zones

We plan to have several types of residents. The main categories of residency are core group residents and extended group residents. The “core group” will live in dwellings owned by the farm, striving to keep expenditures of money and resources at a “fair share” of world consumption, working primarily in farm businesses; the “extended group” will live in their own dwellings near the farm, possibly on land bought from the farm or rented from the farm with short or long-term leases. We expect that both of us, Scott and Peter, will be in the core group, although at some point one or both of us may wish to realign ourselves as extended group residents.

The core group will have temporary and permanent residents. Some residents will be living on the premises for as short as a few weeks of every year, and the international exchange programs will bring in short-term core group residents for stays of one month to several years. When they are present, they will do work in accordance with the standard daily minimum work requirements (DMWR). The DMWR will entitle a core group resident to room, board, and use of facilities. Being a “core group resident” does not entitle a person to any equity or any other privilege, though some will begin as shareholders because of outside assets or, for doing more than the DMWR, will receive additional compensation in the form of either money or shares in the corporation.

Short-Term Residents

Visitors are often a source of income for communities. Although we do want to have many visitors, we do not want Abundance Farm to be economically dependent on receiving guest fees from them. We want to put the visitors to work in the same way as permanent residents. The moment a visitor arrives at the farm, he or she becomes a core group resident. This applies both to the individuals who come on their own and to those who come as part of an international exchange program. They will be working just like we will be working. There will be no guarantee short-term residents can work “extra hours” for money beyond the minimum they will have to work for room and board, but at times extra work will be available. (In order to pay wages legally to foreigners, we will have to get work permits. This does not seem reasonable or a practical thing for short-term residents. Legally speaking, therefore, any compensation for overtime work will be classified as travel reimbursement.)

We would like to have people welcomed into being part of the project as soon as they arrive. They will be invited to group meetings, they will be entitled to vote as residents, and they will be able to participate in discussions. We suspect that meeting rules will evolve to have some minimum of efficiency, such as the establishment of a maximum percentage of time for each person to speak in each meeting. We do want new people to be able to participate, but if the participation of one particular individual, new or established, is substantially counterproductive to the conversation, we expect the meeting foreman will make an effort to bring that person into line or ask that person to refrain from speaking.

A person or small group will be empowered to coordinate short-term resident visits. This coordinator will be a contact for any questions and needs, and also be responsible for asking residents to leave if they are not abiding by their agreements with the farm. Indeed, there will be a contract that will specify the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of the farm and the individual, in general and in the specific case of the individual in question.

Core Group Residents

Initially, the basic residency agreement will be:

Responsibilities of Farm

Provide adequate shelter to protect from weather and biting insects

Provide basic minimum of healthy food & water

Access to basic facilities

Have work available for residents to fulfill Daily Minimum Work Requirement (DMWR)

Provide safe place to store valuables (locked safe)

Responsibilities of Resident

Fulfill DMWR

Don't do anything illegal

Follow other rules established by core group

Being a shareholder does not entitle a person to room and board. It's work that entitles a person to room and board. Essentially, each core group resident is an employee of the corporation.

We aim to keep the DMWR as low as possible, preferably as low as 3 hours per day. In order to do that, we plan to keep the benefits received in exchange at a minimum. Thus, initially there will be no health insurance or coverage of medical expenses, no retirement benefits, no personal allowance, no funding for individual recreational activities. We may at some point provide an "enhanced" option that includes some or all of these benefits in exchange for an increased DMWR, but we may prefer to structure the benefits separately to allow maximum individual freedom in design of personal lifestyles.

Extended Group Residents

Individuals and families who have some alignment with the mission of Abundance Farm, but who wish to have greater autonomy, will reside in the Extended Zone. Properties in the extended zone will be owned or rented long-term by extended group residents, whereas all property in the core area will be owned by the corporation. Extended group residents will pay for building their own homes. They will often be financially independent of the farm, perhaps retired or working outside the farm.

Extended group residents may have arrangements for “board” with the farm proper and for other uses of the facilities. These will be paid for with a monthly fee or labor exchange. Extended group residents may be employees or shareholders but can also work full-time outside the farm. In terms of lifestyle, extended group residents may or may not seek to live at the average global consumption. Certainly, higher consumption could be fair, given a correspondingly high economic production. In the core group, however, we strive for moderate production and low consumption.

Guests who stay with extended group residents will not be required to work. Nor will they have the right to eat at the farm. If the guests do wish to use the farm facilities and eat at the farm, they will have to make some contribution just like extended group residents, which will be worked out with the core group. Otherwise, those guests are the responsibilities of their hosts in the extended group, not of the farm.

Lifestyle

A common piece of advice from those who have started cooperative living ventures in the past is to begin by considering rules on drugs and animals. Here are our thoughts on these and some other categories related under the term 'lifestyle'.

Animals

Having pets is not a priority for us for several reasons: possible disturbance to wildlife; financial outlay; noise; and allergies. In general, we will tell people not to bring pets, especially if they haven't talked to the residents about it first. Pets will be the exception to the rule, and if there are any problems, the fallback is that the pets don't belong. On the other hand, we don't dislike pets per se, and provided they are well cared-for by owners and friendly to residents, we expect to be open to them living with us.

Agricultural animals are part of our vision. We will probably have animals in the fields and in shelters. We would prefer not to kill animals unnecessarily, but we might kill animals from time to time for food or because they represent a danger. Anyone morally opposed to having animals killed may propose alternate solutions (for instance, finding homes for male goats who would otherwise be sold for meat because of their lack of utility in a goat dairy herd), but that would be the responsibility of the persons with the moral qualms.

Drugs

There are various levels of mind-altering substances and activities. On the one hand, we would like to give residents the freedom to make choices about their own mental and physical health. On the other hand, we have concerns about illegal activities threatening the farm's ability to work towards its major goals. We also have concerns with different standards of behavior in a multicultural and multi-age setting. And finally, we have concerns with the net effects of drug use on human beings. Therefore, our bias is towards conservatism.

Although we do not necessarily see the wisdom of governments to create and enforce laws regulating drug use, we nevertheless want to abide by the laws of government. As such, we plan that no illegal drug use will be officially permitted. (Indeed, we favor the policy that no other illegal activities will be permitted on farm property either, perhaps unless we are willing to say in public and post on our website that we are doing it.)

Food

We generally say that a healthy diet is “mostly raw, mostly fresh, mostly organic, not too much food, and tasty.” A healthy diet could be vegan, 100% raw, and completely well-balanced, but we don't think it has to be in order to be healthy. We do think a healthy diet makes for enjoying our own lives, and we aim to eat a healthy diet at Abundance Farm. Human society often has a terrible time with putting dietary advice into practice, and as a result humans often have major diet-related health and emotional problems. We don't have all the answers, but we do think that we are going to try out a variety of ways to achieve healthy, enjoyable eating. Number one is that we will have food available that we consider healthy. Number two is that we will have much less food available that we consider unhealthy. Number three is that we will continue learning about health from science and from experience.

Children, Family, and Education

One of our goals for the farm is to make it a great place to raise kids. We aim to treat the children as much as possible like any other core group residents. This means listening to the children's desires and ideas and giving them the chance to fulfill the reasonable desires and act on new ideas. It also means allowing them to participate in "adult" life with meetings and work requirements. Since we plan to help new residents become productive as quickly as possible, many activities will be structured so that both children and new residents can learn by simply watching or asking.

We don't plan to destroy the nuclear family or invent a new parental structure where the kids belong primarily to the farm. Generally, we consider the choice to have children to be the decision of two people who are life partners. We think the parents themselves, and not the farm-at-large, will have most of the responsibility of providing for and educating the children. We expect that some parents will be comfortable living with their children as residents of the core group, whereas others will choose the time of starting a family as the time to move to their own piece of land in the extended group area.

We will aim for children to develop the skills to be responsible, both individually and in groups. As such, when trouble comes up involving children, our general strategy will not be for adults to solve the problems themselves but for adults and children to work together to think through what to do. The model we propose is essentially that of democratic schools, which are in existence all over the world. In fact, the links to those democratic schools go beyond practical parallels. We envision the farm regularly hosting visiting children from these democratic schools as part of the international exchange program. Likewise, children from Abundance Farm (and to a lesser extent, adults) will visit those schools and communities around the country and abroad as part of their lifestyles, participating in the production and general life there.

We believe in the value of education, through reading books from all cultures and times, through travel, and through examining one's own life. We believe education can be part of the development of clear thinking, harmonious action, and effective planning.

We may at some point have specific "children-only" areas. We also imagine a regular meeting place to discuss daily activities applicable to children. We imagine that some parents will band together to share some teaching and caretaking responsibilities. We do not anticipate having the funds available to fund higher education for children, but we expect that parents and other community members will participate in helping the young adults to develop a plan to work through higher education if that is their passion.

Recreation and Entertainment

To some people, the value of recreation is directly proportional to its price tag. It goes without saying that we don't intend to strive for fun dependent on this criteria. Sometimes, we'll spend a small amount of money on recreation, and sometimes we won't spend any. We will perform some of our own theater, we will have bands where we play original and folk music, and we will have delicious feasts, romantic and raucous. We will have some weeks when we are "in a different period" like the Pushkin Week at the School for Self-Determination in Moscow, Russia, where students wear clothes they made themselves in the style of early-nineteenth-century Russia and perform plays and dances from that era. We might also choose to be "in period" from countries represented in our international exchange program. We will have sports teams and intramural contests. And if the locals in the area like to play soccer, we may form a soccer team to challenge them. We will play chess, ping-pong, swim, hike and perhaps go horseback riding.

Location

There are important basic questions concerning where to locate our project, addressed in the following sections.

- What geographical characteristics do we prefer?
- What political and social characteristics do we want to live around, including residency options and cultural compatibility?
- What are our specific property criteria?
- Which countries could meet all of our criteria?

While the first three sections are considered as if an ideal country could be designed, reality is not so prescribable. In reality, therefore, we have taken individual case examples and investigated to which extent each country matches those criteria, and how well the compromises fit together or conflict in those particular cases. We don't go into that process in depth in this book, however. Like finding the ideal human mate, selecting a country begins as courting individuals one at a time, then forgetting the ones who are not compatible. Once we find the one who seems sufficiently compatible, we make a careful mental check to see that we are not dreaming as we are falling in love.

Thus, when you reach the fourth section, we will introduce the prospective bride, Panama. The reader may consider for him or herself whether we have selected wisely. This is your chance. "Speak now or forever hold your peace."

Geographical Preferences

Climate: A Tropical or Temperate Home Base?

We currently favor the tropics for several reasons. First, it takes more labor and resources to live in cold climates than warm climates, because we have to put more materials and energy into sturdier homes and use energy to keep them warm. Second, we want year-round access to fresh fruits and vegetables grown on site. It is impossible to have this in temperate climates without substantial investments in greenhouses and use of heating energy. Third, the tropics have many more species of delicious, edible fruit. We love fruit. Fourth, we've experienced more comfortable climates in particular zones of the tropics, in particular those with ample sun and moderate humidity. Fifth, reliable breezes, ample sunshine, and running water are also major advantages in terms of renewable electrical generation possibilities, and these are often found in the tropics.

As far as particular tropical choices, we want what we consider a pleasant tropical climate: daily highs of 75-85 F year-round, ample sun year-round, and low incidence of infectious disease.

After this venture in the easily livable tropics, we may at a later date attempt to replicate our project in a more challenging environment. But we'd prefer to start with what we enjoy and what is simplest to accomplish.

Additional Geographical Considerations

Because we both have family in the eastern United States, we have an interest in being conveniently enough located to make visits possible and affordable.

Additionally, we considered the advantages and disadvantages of islands, and prefer to not be on an island. The main factors are again cost and ease of living/transportation.

And finally, insofar as it can be predicted, we'd like a location not prone to natural disasters or wars.

Political and Social Characteristics of Desired Country

We are currently evaluating social and political climates based on the following suitability template.

- 1) Political stability, that is, the safety of persons and the safety of investments.
- 2) Outlook of national economy
- 3) Ease of foreign residency and citizenship
- 4) Foreign guest visas for people from all nations
- 5) Language and cultural barriers
- 6) Hygiene levels, drinking water availability, infectious disease issues
- 7) Land property taxes
- 8) Economic viability of agriculture and light industry
- 9) Feasible cost of land (100 desirable acres can be purchased for \$200,000 or less)
- 10) Availability of affordable healthcare
- 11) Lenient building and zoning codes
- 12) Flexible education requirements

In addition to the obvious goals, one less obvious one contained in these criteria is our goal to have a place conducive to become a destination for a diversity of short-term and permanent residents from around the world. We think that visitors will provide the basic supply of new residents.

Property Characteristics

Necessities

We want sufficient land to provide for our own energy and food consumption and still have surplus food and energy for sale. At the same time, we want to set aside land for conservation. In Asia, self-sufficient peasant farmers lived at a density of about 1 per acre¹. An American experimenter claims to have developed a sustainable system of gardening that provides a nourishing, vegetarian diet on about a quarter acre (reference to Jeavons). We have therefore come up with a minimum size of a hundred acres for our initial purchase, at least 10-15 acres of which are moderately fertile and well-suited for agriculture, to serve an intermediate target population of 50. This will amount to one quarter acre of good farmland per person. ***One hundred acres (or preferably more) can be bought for \$200,000 (or preferably less).***

We would like to have available public transportation running nearby several times a day, to be within several hours of a regional airport and emergency medical facilities, to have cell phone or phone access, and have nearby markets for products. Although these are separate criteria, we approximate this by stating ***the land should be within one two hours of a city of 50,000.***

We also need a specific piece of property that is well-suited for our project. This means **availability of and rights to sufficient clean water for drinking and agriculture, compatibility with local population, some capability for renewable electrical energy generation, undeveloped nearby land available for future purchase, and some already cleared land with soils and topography appropriate for immediate food production.**

Pleasantries

1. Already established nut trees
2. Natural running water
3. Good views
4. Abundant possibilities for renewable electrical energy generation
5. Other barter-friendly communities exist within reasonable distances
6. Natural place to swim
7. Established ponds for aquaculture
8. A few existing simple structures
9. Established product and market (e.g. 20 acres of avocados)
10. Internet access capability

¹ according to studies cited in Odum, H.T. *Environment, Power, and Society*

11. Within 24 hr travel of NYC
12. Sloping land
13. Low property taxes
14. Diversity of natural materials on site (e.g. sand, clay, stones)
15. Locals who are knowledgeable and interested in teaching about agriculture and ecology
16. Diversity of established fruit trees
17. Some established timber/conservation forest area
18. Convenient access to level trails or roads for running
19. Likelihood of property value appreciation

Which Country? Panama.

It was one thing to have an initial list of criteria and to begin researching in the library, on the internet, and by asking friends for advice. It was another thing to list a slew of countries to visit. It was yet another thing to actually go to several locations in person. We expected when we embarked on six weeks in Central America that we would travel to Panama simply to give us a comparison for the advantages we predicted for Costa Rica. In fact, after four weeks in Costa Rica and two weeks in Panama, what happened was the opposite. Our choice is Panama.

Before embarking on our trip, we had considered visiting many more countries, as far away as Hawaii, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. But we only finished the first major leg: part of Central America. And yet, we believe that what we have found is a sufficiently good match that we need not explore further. Our choice is Panama.

Geographical Considerations

After visiting the lowlands and midlands and highlands over 1200 meters in Costa Rica and Panama, we found that land in Costa Rica and Panama between 400 and 1100 meters above sea level on the Pacific side of the mountains would fit our climate criteria and offer properties that meet our property “necessities” and many of our “pleasantries.” This altitude and location affords the possibility to grow both tropical fruits and temperate vegetables. It has a slightly cooler, drier, and more pleasant climate than either the Caribbean side of the mountains or the Pacific lowlands, with sufficient annual rainfall (generally 1.5m-3m per year). In Panama, 80-90% of the vegetable production occurs on the soils of Volcan Baru near the border with Costa Rica at elevations over 1200 meters. Due to the cool weather at these heights, however, it is not possible to grow such delicacies as mango, papaya, pejibaye (a starchy native fruit that grows in clumps on tall, thin palms), and countless other delicious fruits. Thus, we prefer a slightly lower altitude than is optimal for vegetables and are willing to be more restricted in our variety selection for the temperate vegetables to tolerate the warmer midlands.

Panama also has excellent roads throughout much of the country, affordable domestic flights, inexpensive flights to the mainland US, and land routes through Central America back to the US.

Political and Social Considerations

We did consider Hawaii in our initial research, and although it was a close call, for the time being we have chosen not to visit. We currently believe that for our project Hawaii is less attractive than Costa Rica and Panama: first and foremost, because the land is more expensive; second, because of ultimate implications for who the residents

will be. Central America has more international travelers than Hawaii, especially Europeans and North/South Americans. And we think it is important to remedy the growing rifts between Americans and Europeans, who we consider will continue leading the world together on the global political and economic fronts. In regards to the question of long-term residency, it is easier to obtain visas, residency and citizenship for people of all nations in Panama and Costa Rica, relative to the United States. Indeed, in both Costa Rica and Panama, all that is required is to exit the country every 3-6 months to maintain unofficial permanent residency, practically for free, whereas in the United States there is no comparable option. But, all in all, the major reason we did not need to go to Hawaii is because we have already found a suitable country in Panama.

Health insurance in Panama ranges from \$3 per month (\$50,000 deductible, \$1,000,000 maximum lifetime benefit) to \$200 per month (which includes coverage for out-of-country care). Basic, in-Panama coverage with small deductibles and co-payments are about \$20 per month for a 20-year-old to about \$75 per month for a 70-year-old.

Investment Security

We did at one point have concerns about the investment and personal security of Central American countries. Investment security is an issue because of tenuous property rights in some countries due to squatters' rights, as well as because of possible nationalization of lands (as happened in Nicaragua and Mexico less than 30 years ago). Finally, investment security is an issue because of currency crises.

Squatters' rights are somewhat of an issue in all Central American countries. Depending on the type of title, a person may have the right to "take over" vacated land and gain the right of possession on it, and eventually the right to the title of that land. Many properties do not have title, and this makes the problems of squatters even more threatening. However, we found that by careful research, hiring a good lawyer, buying only titled land, and by actually living on the property oneself, that squatters rights will not present a major problem in Panama.

Nationalization of lands also does not seem to be an issue in Panama. The country has a history of positive business relations with US and foreign citizens, since thousands and thousands of US citizens were employed in the Canal Zone. Many of them then bought property and settled in Panama proper. Although the politicians in Panama are generally viewed to have some measure of corruption, it is to a tolerable degree and does not extend as far as taking over private lands either for the government or for themselves. (In fact, it's also worth noting that even the US Citizens whose land was confiscated in Nicaragua were eventually remunerated.) We are not concerned about confiscation of land in Panama.

Panama has used the US Dollar as its official currency since its creation in 1903. Although we do have some concerns about the dollar, we are more confident of it than an unlinked, developing-world currency.

Personal Security

Both Costa Rica and Panama have eliminated their military (Costa Rica about 60 years ago and Panama about 10 years ago), though both countries do have armed police. Yet questions still come to mind for many Americans when they think of Panama – *isn't that country drawn to dictators?*

Well, it may be. But we think that if Panama (or any country we have thus far considered) ever was to institute dangerous authoritarian rule, we would realize it before it is too late and leave the country. The 1999 US Consular information sheet indicates that approximately 20,000 US Citizens were legal residents of each of the countries considered we visited, Panama and Costa Rica.

In fact, we believe that because of the US interest in the Panama Canal, Panama is particularly safe for US citizens. For over a hundred years, Panama has been in a somewhat dependent relationship with the US. Although Panama now runs the Canal Zone itself, the US is formally recognized in the Canal Treaties to have the right to intervene, should there be any threat to the US right to use the canal. Indeed, Panama seems to be slowly building its own mechanisms for self-government, but there is an attitude and comfort there that should anything problematic occur, the US would intervene on behalf of its citizens residing abroad and its economic/military interest in the canal.

We would also say that supply lines of the basics in the US are more tenuous than Americans would like to admit. If unpredictable disaster does strike, and transportation is crippled worldwide, at least people in the countryside of Central America still know how to grow food. In the US, not many people live in the countryside and know how to grow food anymore.

We didn't have anything stolen from us in Panama. On the Pacific side of Panama, we did not feel we had to be on our guard. (On the Caribbean side of Panama, we did, however, feel we had to be careful concerning the safety of our property and selves.) Supporting this anecdotal evidence, it is widely quoted by foreigners enjoying life in Panama that the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Agency recently gave Panama its highest rating for tourist safety (though, we could not find the actual report ourselves).

Residency Legality, Visas, Finances, and Feel

The consensus in Costa Rica is that life for foreigners is not getting any more pleasant there, and indeed, it's getting to be unsafe and unpleasant. Numerous foreign residents and visitors thought that the government would soon only give residency to foreigners with a lot of money, perhaps as high as a \$500,000 minimum investment in Costa Rica. Most foreigners currently overstaying the 90 days automatically granted to US and EU citizens can simply leave the country for 72 hours (hanging out in Nicaragua or Panama), re-enter, and then receive an additional 90 days. People claim to have done this for years. This practice, however, might be illegal soon, depending on currently pending Costa Rican legislation.

When we recapped the final leg of our trip in Costa Rica leg, we felt increased

clarity that while the local restaurant food and fruit selection is better in comparison to Panama, it's not enough to outweigh the obstacles of Costa Rica: higher land and commodity prices, less compatible culture, more difficulty in gaining residency, and general nationalistic attitudes of Costa Ricans. As an example of the "gut feeling" about the cultures, we felt that when talking with (non-Caribbean) Panamanians, we could say 'let us speak frankly' and then we could speak more frankly, whereas with Ticos (slang for "Costa Ricans") a statement like that would be considered just a bargaining position. Panama feels more like a melting pot of cultures and more "open for the business of life," whereas Costa Rica is a place where foreigners stay separate, like oil and water, and are seen as major sources of revenue, over the table, under the table, and sometimes with a knife to one's back.

Panama allows many foreign nationals to visit for 30, 60, or 90 days with no visa (and allows for one-time extension of many of those stays from within the country). This "unofficial residency" route taken by many in Central America will likely be a popular option for residents of Abundance Farm. However, Panama does offer a variety of possibilities for official residency, including "person of means" (at least \$200,000 in the bank), retired (with a known pension), forestry or investor residency, student visas, missionary visas, working residency, and even immigrant farmers demonstrating agricultural competency. We have been in contact with one Panamanian lawyer who has suggested that it is feasible and inexpensive to set up a school that could facilitate student-type visas for the exchange programs. We believe that over time we will be able to develop relationships with the Panamanian government to streamline our visa and residency issues. (Two institutions have already accomplished this: the Peace Corps and the Smithsonian Institute, and we are happy to learn from and follow the examples of others).

Legal fees in Panama tend to be low – less than \$1,000 to set up a corporation and half that per year for legal expenses, for instance. Property taxes are next to nonexistent. Income tax is low. (Taxes can remain low partly because the Panama Canal provides a dependable and significant revenue stream). And while some properties can be many thousand dollars per acre, an ample supply of good property is available for less than five hundred dollars per acre. We expect that we can purchase a property that fits our criteria for less than \$2000 per acre.

Final Thoughts on Locating Outside the US

After returning to the United States, we are reaffirmed that life outside the United States could better support our values of sustainability, human unity, and happiness. In terms of sustainability, the United States has invested billions of dollars in an unsustainable transportation system that depends on cheap energy and enormous road and vehicle maintenance expenditures. Life and economic activity in the United States is highly dependent on this transportation system, and we would prefer not to devote 20% of our average income to pay for automobiles, gas, insurance, and new and improved roads² (although carsharing in US-based communities could go a long way in saving money and energy). We understand that cars provide people freedom to change locations rapidly, but this movement is dependent on major sacrifices of time and energy for the underlying structure. And we can't ever build roads big enough. In Atlanta, L.A. and cities across the country, rush hours find thousands upon thousands of cars backed up on sixteen-lane interstates. Of course, the US transportation system is just part of an overall level of consumption in America which is the highest in the world. In terms of overall energy use, the United States is consuming 25% of the world's fossil fuels each year. Guaranteeing current consumption levels and being able to fulfill the average American's expectations for what he or she is entitled to consume is dangerous ground to tread in terms of global politics and "homeland security." There is truth in the argument of critics of the war in Iraq that it's all about oil. Thus, in terms of human unity, we would prefer not to pay taxes to support the exorbitant military expenditures or the expensive border controls to maintain our high wages and material abundance. We support Americans who try to change the practices of the US government and the US people, but this is not a fight for us. We think there is a need for Americans to live in the third world for the purpose of citizen-to-citizen diplomacy and mutual cultural exchange.

In Central America, most people get around on buses, a great example of sharing a physical resource. Buses are not as immediately time-efficient as personal vehicles, but when well-utilized are a more sustainable use of energy and materials. Indeed, Central American buses are usually full and thus obtain a higher ratio of passenger mile to energy expenditure and material use. You only find a four-lane road in Central America when the Pan-American highway approaches and passes through the major cities. As we explained above, we also prefer the winterless tropics because of the permanent growing season and ease of constructing and maintaining comfortable housing.

² Based on February 2004 Department of Labor Statistics report

International Exchange Programs

We hold that informal and formal international exchanges are important to the increasing peacefulness and harmony of the planet. Suppose that Stalin and Hitler and Bin Laden and the Bushes and many of the Russians, Germans, Americans, and Arabs who support them had developed friendships with people from each other's countries. Suppose they had at least met some people from each other's countries who visited them and sang songs with them and listened to them and said, "What is your favorite fruit?" We recognize that the effects of such meetings are hard to quantify. However, we do not consider the challenges of measurability to be a reason for not doing the work. Particularly if we enjoy the work. The wars that are fought today may have to be fought today and we don't claim to be able to stop them, but we do aim to contribute to reducing the likelihood of future wars that may be fought in 30 and 50 years.

We expect that people from all over the world from diverse backgrounds will spend days, months, years, or entire lives at Abundance Farm, living simply and happily. We aim to be a location where international exchanges are regularly taking place in the context of living sustainably. We think there will be children and adults coming in ones, twos, and dozens, spending time with us.

We do not aim to receive general budgetary support for running these programs. Abundance Farm aims to support its own operations. We do plan to accept donations to support the legal and transportation expenses for the programs, but this will not cover any operating expenses of Abundance Farm itself. We also plan to put the short-term residents who are part of these international exchanges to work alongside us in our businesses.

We expect that getting to know other cultures will present many challenges and many pleasures. We hope to develop the attitudes and tools to embrace these challenges, working together and relating to each other honestly and kindly.

Appendices

Personnel

Scott Devine

During my sophomore year of high school, I had an epiphany that now seems so simple: I thought happiness was possible with less consumption and less work. I even thought that self-reliance in meeting basic needs might be vital to happiness and survival and fantasized about becoming a farmer one day. At that time, I thought this would be a great escape from the 9 to 5 treadmill. I did not seriously pursue this fantasy, however, until three years after the epiphany when I worked on an vegetable farm in Wales for a month. It wasn't nearly as romantic as I had imagined, but I continued farming and gardening since then, setting up a community garden on my college campus and becoming involved in the university's student farm. Recently, I toured parts of Latin America learning about and taking part in tropical agriculture.

Now, I have a dream about a single place to call home. I want to walk the fields, forests and furrows with an intimate knowledge of the plants and animals and microbes and seasonal changes, not just as a hobby, but because that knowledge will be useful to the purpose of living harmoniously and sustainably from sunlight. It's a tantalizing project, that is, to try to create mental models of ecological dynamics, to use the mind as a kind of conscious mirror of an infinitely complex hundred or so acres, to revel in these patterns and make use of them.

My family wants me to find a home in the US. I do have an emotional and intellectual attachment to the hills here in the Southern Appalachians and, if Peter had not e-mailed me last October about a list-serv he created called "living our dreams," then I would be planting tomatoes as a caretaker of a friend's farm in east Tennessee at this very moment. For two years leading up to my college graduation, I spent hours in the libraries researching the possibilities for an innovative farm in the southeast US. Right now, the most likely plan for me is to return to the southeastern US in 4-5 years after pioneering the development of Abundance Farm. In fact, as I am writing this, I have just completed researching the purchase of property in East Tennessee, North Georgia, and Western North Carolina for possible purchase by my parents, which I could eventually call my home. But, for now, I'm going to leave that purchase for the future and focus on Abundance Farm. Indeed, one of my weaknesses in the past has been to take on too many projects at once.

Who knows, maybe Panama will be my ultimate home? Or maybe I can be like a migratory songbird, spending a portion of the year in the temperate climate when the land is really fruitful and returning to the tropics to sing, work, and harvest when not.

On the one hand, I'm scared of sinking my assets into a place I might want to leave. It seems like my whole life has been a process of waiting for the good life to begin just as soon as "this crap" ends. I think of my seventeen years in public schools (of course, not entirely bad years at all), watching the hands of the clock go round and around from another desk. This pattern continues for me: my dissatisfaction and feeling

of imprisonment and sense that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. But I also know this desire to “move on” is natural for some people. Humans have a long history of migration and entering lands never explored before or sparsely populated. Successes in these migrations reinforced the desire.

On the other hand, I would like to have a share of Abundance Farm, because I really like and trust Peter. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship to North Carolina State University that covered all of my tuition and living expenses, which is where I graduated in 2003 at the age of 23. My parents decided to give me some of the money they would have spent on my higher ed, since they had given money to all three of my sisters for school. So, having traveled for almost a year since graduation, spending over 7 months in Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Panama, as well as a portion in the eastern US, I still have a small amount of savings, and I will probably invest half of this in Abundance Farm. Although my parents would prefer that I saved the money for graduate school, they still support me. I have decided not to attend another university unless one of two factors occur: I decide my role in society should be in the policy realm where an advanced degree is necessary; or, I decide that the higher ed infrastructure is necessary for a research question I want to answer.

It’s time now to make my thinking about agriculture and humanity more of a reality. And to just see what living is like beyond a desk.

Scott Devine
Roanoke, VA
May 2004

Peter Christopher

We can develop clarity in our dreams, but I suspect that in order for those dreams to be realized by us, the dreams must be continuations of already-existing trends in us.

Adina Gordon captured well several of the trends in my life, when she wrote my personal mission statement at the 2003 Creating Human Community retreat:

To free himself from social, physical & economic conventions in order to explore new ways of thinking and living based on intellectual harmony, world-wide connections, and emotional honesty & integrity.

This description touches on both the deconstructive and constructive tendencies in my life. I'll expand upon these themes.

In terms of the deconstructive, I have sought to be in touch with the mechanisms of how I operate, mentally, physically, and socially, and how the world around me operates. I have done this by putting myself in situations that scare me, by being courageous in my actions knowing I will make mistakes, by trying to acknowledge and remedy those mistakes, by questioning conventional assumptions and positing new ways of understanding experience, by seeking out those who have and are living unconventional lives on their own, and by learning from diverse traditions. I attended a private highschool (Northfield Mount Hermon) and a private college (Hampshire College). In both those contexts, as well as in my self-designed informal education since then, I have sought to benefit from institutions and also to go beyond their limits, taking responsibility for my own education and being.

On the constructive side, I have been active in founding several new entities (both short-lived and ongoing). This began ten years ago as a college student with the Alternative Higher Education Network (defunct), the Experimental Program in Education and Community (ongoing), and other similar programs. It continued in "the real world" when I started Hurricane Hill School (defunct), a summer educational program in Vermont.

Then, for one year, I took leave from constructively creating social/educational programs, accepting a job at Amazon.com as a software engineer. That was constructive in its own very different ways. Since I left that job, I have been living in assorted homes in the US and traveling around the world, learning informally and engaging deconstructively to understand myself and the world. I fortunately still have a few dollars from my Amazon.com stock option earnings. Overall, I have the chance now to combine my skills and experience, with my present energy, and resources to help make Abundance Farm a reality.

Throughout these years, I have also been a writer, lover of children and friends, runner, and gardener. I have not published any of my writing, but I think I may make an effort in that direction over the next several years.

Last fall, on a trip in Morocco, I wrote:

I am pleased about many aspects of being here. And yet I am also aware wanting to

leave. Leaving is familiar. Finding fault is familiar. Fantasizing about “something else” to strive for is familiar. I have been moving from one project and place to the next since quitting highschool. One day I will stop moving and work through those issues. Maybe it gets harder to stay every time I leave. But also I am becoming more clear that I will soon be ready to cocreate a home and relationships that match me well enough that I will stay. It is not far off now.

I find myself more and more comfortable relating to people who are married, with children, with a place they call home. I recognized this transition last year, and related to that, I brought together friends in several email groups, beginning with *living_our_dreams*, and continuing by planning the Creating Human Community retreat in December of 2003.

At that retreat, I wrote the following as my conceptualization of the common vision Scott and I shared for community:

To live sustainably, harmoniously, and ecstatically in physical reality and human community, able to welcome and catalyze increasing sustainability, harmony, and ecstasy in all creation.

I am confident of some of my abilities, though I realize I also have a variety of weaknesses. I am able to bring people together to confront obstacles and create. I am able to take responsibility, to learn, and also to sit back when others are being responsible.

I recognize that it is likely I will be the majority shareholder of the corporation, simply because of the funds I have available. I have also been the most active throughout the entire project, having visited the most comparison projects, started the email lists, organized the Creating Human Community retreat, and written most of this book. Due to these factors, my influence in designing the project is more than Scott's, and Scott's is more than anyone else's.

I do hope that what we create will be a wonderful place for others to visit or to live, and where others can have a role in making Abundance Farm an expression of their dreams as well as mine and Scott's. But I don't intend to unilaterally hand over my assets to people who are new to the project. As I have invested my own time and money, others who likewise make contributions will also correspondingly find this project to be an expression of themselves, perhaps some of them some day having more influence than I will then have.

I think Scott and I can have a wonderful farm even if it is only the two of us who are permanent or semi-permanent residents. On the other hand, I also look forward to the many people who may join us, who together with us will raise Abundance Farm from wonderful to ecstatic.

Bring your dancing shoes.

Peter Christopher
San Francisco, California
May, 2004

Projected Budget

			Amount
Shares			
2004 Transactions	Investor, Stock Purchase	\$100,000.00	100 shares
	Investor, Stock Purchase	\$25,000.00	25 shares
2004 Year-End Balance	Total cash on hand		\$125,000.00
125 shares			
2005 Transactions	Land Purchase		-\$100,000.00
	Building Materials		-\$10,000.00
	Agricultural Materials, Food, Business Expe		-\$10,000.00
	Investor, Stock Purchase		\$10,000.00
10 shares			
2005 Year-End Balance	Land Value		\$110,000.00
	Land Improvements		\$20,000.00
	Cash on Hand		\$15,000.00
	Total Assets		\$145,000.00
135 shares			
2006 Transactions	Building Materials		-\$10,000.00
	Agricultural Materials, Food, Business Expe		-\$10,000.00
	Investor, Stock Purchase		\$20,000.00
18 shares			
2006 Year-End Balance	Land Value		\$120,000.00
	Land Improvements		\$50,000.00
	Cash on Hand		\$15,000.00
	Total Assets		\$165,000.00
153 shares			
2007 Transactions	Building Materials		-\$10,000.00
	Agricultural Materials, Food, Business Expe		-\$10,000.00
	Business Income		\$10,000.00
2007 Year-End Balance	Land Value		\$130,000.00
	Land Improvements		\$75,000.00
	Cash on Hand		\$5,000.00
	Total Assets		\$210,000.00
153 shares			
2008 Transactions	Building Materials		-\$15,000.00
	Agricultural Materials, Food, Business Expe		-\$15,000.00
	Business Income		\$20,000.00
	Investor, Stock Purchase		\$10,000.00
8 shares			
2008 Year-End Balance	Land Value		\$140,000.00
	Land Improvements		\$100,000.00
	Cash on Hand		\$5,000.00
	Total Assets		\$245,000.00
161 shares			
2009 Transactions	Building Materials		-\$15,000.00
	Agricultural Materials, Food, Business Expe		-\$15,000.00
	Business Income		\$40,000.00
2009 Year-End Balance	Land Value		\$150,000.00
	Land Improvements		\$125,000.00
	Cash on Hand		\$15,000.00
	Total Assets		\$290,000.00
161 shares			

Timeline

(Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter refer to the US calendar usage of these terms.)

Fall 2003 – Initial discussions of project on the internet group living_our_dreams.

Winter 2003/4 – “Creating Human Community Retreat” at Ganas in New York. Creation of email group trailblazing_green_community. Onsite research of communities in the US.

Spring 2004 – Peter and Scott in Central America for 6 weeks of research with Anita, Joseph, Meli, and Ryan, then back in the US. Writing of this book, a chance to step back and become clear on our vision.

Summer 2004 – Peter in Panama: selecting a lawyer, preparing for incorporation, continued research of local land, climate, culture characteristics within Panama, local agricultural techniques. Scott working at an organic orchard/vegetable farm in Virginia.

Fall 2004 – Scott and Peter in Panama. Incorporation. Investigating specific available properties.

Winter 2004/5 – Purchase of 100-200 acres of land in Panama.

2005 - Initial cultivation of crops and planting of trees. Construction of initial housing. Beginning of tree nursery, using seeds from local suppliers and suppliers around the world.

2006 – Initial development of farm businesses on experimental basis. 5-10 permanent core residents by year end. 50% self-sufficiency of food production, 25% of material/energy self-sufficiency by year-end.

2007 - First formal international exchange programs. One or more businesses selected for focused implementation.

2008 – Businesses producing operating income sufficient to fund all operating expenses and most capital improvements by year-end. 10-20 permanent core residents by year-end.

2010 – Additional land purchase completed, 50-1000 acres. 20-30 permanent core residents by year-end. 75% self-sufficiency of food and seed production, 50% self-sufficiency of material/energy consumption.

2015 – 40-60 permanent core residents by year-end. 75% self-sufficiency of energy and materials. Maximum size and limits to growth considered. Possible other projects

founded.

We expect permanent core residents to comprise one third of the total population at any time, with an additional one third permanent extended group residents, and one third temporary residents. Thus, multiply population numbers by three for total population.

Narratives

We have written several fictional narratives, from the point of view of persons at several points in the future sharing their perspectives on Abundance Farm at that time. The only “nonfiction” names are Peter and Scott. The dates indicate when the narratives are hypothetically written.

Marguerite, a founder without money to invest, 2007

I am Marguerite. I grew up in France. I am 41. I met Scott and Peter in David, Panama, one day in October, 2004. I had been traveling a lot, trying to figure out how to live a lifestyle I felt good about. I was ready to stop. I first met Peter at the market and decided to come with him and Scott to visit the piece of land they liked the most and talk about their vision for Abundance Farm.

I was intrigued by the project and fell in love with the land, although the accommodations left much to be desired. Scott and Peter paid for the land in late 2004, and the three of us moved onto the land January 1 of 2005. The only building when we moved there was an old wooden shack. Everybody slept under it on the rare nights when it rained, but mostly Peter and Scott slept out in the field and I had the ratty shack to myself.

I had a few thousand dollars from savings, but I didn't want to put it into stock of the company. I thought I might want to return to France someday and need those savings to get settled back in.

I was already knowledgeable about raising animals, and we all agreed that I could be in charge of the animals for at least the first several years. Almost the first thing I did was go to town on the bus and buy chicks with money from the farm budget. Scott was the official treasurer, so I had to go to Scott to get the money from him. Scott recorded that, like he recorded all the financial transactions.

After three months, Scott and I finished three basic lean-tos which is where we each had our belongings and beds. In the meantime, Peter constructed a kitchen and planted many rows of plants. This whole time, everybody was working about six hours a day and nobody thought much about the official work requirements.

Around that time, I brought up the issue of Daily Minimum Work Requirements (DMWRs) in a group meeting and suggested that since everyone was working about 6 hours a day, that the DMWR be 6 units per day, since one unit should be worth one hour, except when for some reason it is worth more or less. I also proposed that everyone receive \$1,000 for the work we had done thus far. Scott and Peter disagreed, explaining that people only get paid if they work *more* than the DMWR. I therefore revised my proposal so that the DMWR would be 4 units per day, and that everyone receive \$1 per hour backpay (90 days x \$2 per day = \$180 total backpay per person). Everyone agreed, and Scott paid out the money.

That first year, Scott said he realized he didn't like being the treasurer, and I said

that I didn't like it either but I was willing to do it for double pay (1 unit per half-hour). Scott said he wouldn't want to do it unless he got triple pay, and Peter said he'd need 10x pay. So I became the new treasurer for the time being, and Scott took on a new, invented position, paying at par (1 unit per hour) - "labor coordinator" where he kept track of hours everyone worked, instead of monies spent, which he had been doing as treasurer.

I sometimes worked just the DMWR, then for months on end worked 5 extra hours, 5 days a week, building stuff for the farm. One dollar per hour isn't a lot, but it's the going rate that everyone had decided upon, and it's the basic wage of Panamanians, so it's what worked. It is still the basic wage at the farm a couple years later. The basic DMWR covers room and board, and the expenses for when I go to town for official business. It didn't, and still doesn't, cover health care expenses. Luckily, we don't get sick much, and when we do, we know how to take care of ourselves.

At the end of 2005, I was confident enough about the project to invest \$1000 of my cash plus the \$400 I had earned into stock of the corporation. As a group, we also decided that since we were all better at our jobs, that we got a raise, kind of, in the form of a 25% bonus for our hourly work, because of being more efficient. From that point on, some of my work that was previously valued at par was now valued at 1.25 units/hour, although what was already paid above par (for me, only the treasurer job, at 2 units/hour) remained unchanged. In the first half of 2006, I earned another \$600 from excess work, got a gift of \$10,000 from a deceased aunt, worked at an outside job at the neighbor's for \$200, and decided to invest this entire \$10,800 in equity in the corporation at the end of 2006. The corporation accepted the investment, although shares were selling for 15% higher than the original share price due to the increase in land value and improvements to the property.

I'd like to stay here forever. I may even be more committed than Peter and Scott, who have the additional flexibility/complication of more assets. And, although I will always be only a minor shareholder, after 10 years I hope to own 10% of the corporation, which should be worth about \$60,000. I don't plan to sell it, though. I'd like to become the president of the corporation. People here already think of me as one of the founders, alongside Peter and Scott, even though I was never a trailblazer and contributed no money at founding.

Here are a few more details. When Scott and Peter bought the land in late 2004, Scott invested \$25,000 and Peter invested \$100,000. The land was \$100,000. We also spent an additional \$10,000 on the expenses during the next year of building basic infrastructure. Two years into the project (now - 2007), an adjacent piece of land has become available. Peter is talking about lending \$100,000 as a mortgage for the corporation to purchase this new piece of land, paying 5% per year (interest only) with a lump payment in 5 years (2012) of the balance due of \$100,000. In the meantime, he would use the 5% interest he would earn per year to buy more stock in the corporation. The farm, in turn, would be producing sufficient operating income to pay the interest, and eventually the principal on that mortgage. If the businesses don't do as well as we predict, some of the principal will have to be repaid with additional equity investments or by selling land.

Peter has also been considering moving back to the states for personal reasons, which, as I understand, is related to agreements with his family. We've talked about that as well, and Peter has offered to sell his stock back to the corporation for \$180,000 cash

in 3 years. We strive to have the flexibility to allow each person to leave the project with their assets at fair value, rather than having to sacrifice their assets when they leave.

Fred, an early interested party who did not become a resident, 2007

I am Fred, 29. I joined the “trailblazing_green_community” and “living_our_dreams” list-serves one day in 2004 because I was searching for an intentional community to join. At the time, I had actually never visited an intentional community. I enjoyed being part of the lively discussions online and several times also on the phone. I thought the people active in the group were putting their money where their mouth was by trying to find the right country to start their new project. I found myself unsure of my own commitment level, yet I took some vacation time from my job, and joined Peter and Scott as they were traveling in Costa Rica and Panama.

I realized on that trip that I was not ready to be involved full-time with their project, and yet on the other hand I wasn't comfortable making the compromises of allowing the more committed participants to make the major decisions without me.

All in all, it was valuable for me to make the trip in 2004. I've kept in touch with them. I just never took the jump in my life the way they did. It's harder to make a huge lifestyle change like that than I thought. I've visited several other communities now. I'm still considering making that step. I am planning to visit Abundance Farm in the next year and see how things are going for them.

Gwen, a short-term guest, 2005

I am back in Germany after six months of traveling in Central America. I have dual American-German citizenship, and actually grew up mostly in the States, but I'm here in Munich because I got my Master's degree here and also have a great job and boyfriend here. Last month, I spent a week at Abundance Farm before I flew from Panama City back to Munich. I had found their website from Germany when I was researching my trip to Central America. I didn't e-mail the group until I arrived in Central America; actually, I didn't e-mail them until a week before I arrived, from an internet café in San Jose, Costa Rica. I don't usually plan very far ahead.

They responded to my email a couple days later, and I read their response in Buenos Aires, Costa Rica, after I had been checking out this other community in Costa Rica. Marguerite from the "residency committee" said they had several beds available, and that I could arrive on the date and stay for the week I'd proposed. She also attached a short description of their expectations for visitors and a warning that the accommodations would be primitive. Well, that was fine with me, so I emailed them back to confirm. After a few more days in Costa Rica, I crossed the border into Panama, took the bus to some arbitrary place on the Pan-American Highway three hours towards Panama City, waited an hour in the sun, took another bus up a hill for a half-hour into the mountains and got off near the entrance to the farm (I had to tell the bus driver in Spanish, "Quiero bajar del bus a la entrada de Finca Abundancia.") Then I had to walk a kilometer along a dusty road to the property. It was the end of the dry season.

I asked a couple people for Marguerite, and in short order found her. She was building some chicken tractors out of bamboo, trying to reduce the amount of metal needed for each one. It seemed to be slow going; she said she had been weaving bamboo and wires for two hours but it looked like she hadn't done more than a quarter of one. I think she should have just bought chicken wire and not worried about it. Most of the others there agreed with me, but she quoted Edison: "Genius is 1 per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration." Whatever her commitment to perspiration, (and her shirts always indicated a practical commitment as well as a philosophical one), she happily took a break from her work to orient me to the farm. She showed me to the new guest quarters to drop off my stuff. It had a roof and one wall, but basically everyone there lives in lean-tos; this one still didn't have the last two walls (no privacy for me there). The guest lean-to they now use has six beds, each one with some storage shelves underneath for people's stuff and a mosquito net above. There were two other guests sleeping in the lean-to and three other guests sleeping in their own tents elsewhere on the property.

Then we went to the office, which is the only building there that actually has four solid walls. I locked my passport and wallet in the safe. Marguerite is the only one who knows how to open it. She said I wouldn't need any money while I was there. She was right. I didn't. She also said that the core group residents don't usually spend their own money on anything and usually don't buy luxuries - just basic necessities. And she said that officially the farm doesn't have guests or visitors, it only has core group residents. Anyone who stayed on the property was implicitly agreeing to the standards of being a

core group resident. I read a document that described those standards. It was all fine.

At first, I did have some concerns because there seemed to be a private language, which it took me a while to get used to. They had their own words for everything - "core group" and "corporation contact" and "chicken captain". They used these words like they actually thought there was such a thing as a "chicken captain" (this was one of Marguerite's jobs). I suppose it could be just like any other local dialect. When I brought this up in a meeting, Peter said he didn't like the "title" or "role" of Chicken Captain either. He said my comments provided him just the excuse to propose we do away with it, and we spent five minutes brainstorming alternatives, but no one, including Peter, came up with anything any better and so the discussion was shelved. But two days later Marguerite said that she wanted her title to be "Animal Husbandry Wife." She also said she wanted to be in charge of the goats again; she had had enough of a break from them. Scott said it was fine for her to take over that responsibility again and so it was all approved.

They do sometimes get into rather personal discussions in the meetings, but they seemed to enjoy that.

They have meetings every morning at ten o'clock with breakfast, six days a week. Sometimes the meetings last just a half-hour, but they can run as long as two hours. This is after four hours of work, since most people work from six to ten in the morning. They also have separate "work meetings" for as long as it takes (usually a few minutes, but one went on for half an hour) every day of the week when people plan out their work for the next day, if they don't already know what they have to do.

In my first few days, I had been mostly doing "forestry" work in the mornings, which consisted of cutting down bamboo from a neighbor's property and cutting it to size for construction. I was working with Francine. We had fun and worked hard. I got sweaty, which I was used to after six months of traveling in the tropics. But after three days of doing this every day for four hours, I was needing a break from it (the daily minimum work requirement (DMWR), was set at four units every day, seven days a week and I was working 'at par' which means I was getting one unit per hour, though Francine was getting 'par plus 50' which means 1.50 units per hour of work).

I brought this up at the work meeting, and Buddy, the work coordinator, said the farm needed the bamboo now, and since Francine said I was doing good work, I could bid up to par plus 50 if I did it for two hours a day, and another hour of cooking at par would fulfill my quota. I agreed to that. Then the next morning I brought up the issue of the secret code language at the group meeting, and how it was hard for guests to integrate in with the existing residents. "We don't have guests here, we just have core group residents," Marguerite said, smiling, and everybody laughed, which I found frustrating at the time, but now I realize what the joke was, and that it wasn't on me but just on words.

Then Francine suggested that I be put in charge of updating the "Translation Manual," which is supposed to be helpful to new arrivals since it provides a translation for all the words. The work coordinator said the job was worth 3 units altogether or at par if I wanted to work hourly, in either case a unit of extra work was a dollar, which sucks, but I figured what the heck, so I took that job too, and I chose to do it for 3 units not hourly. This all seemed to happen quickly at the group meeting without any votes, which seems odd because they claim that all decisions are made formally.

Well, this is all pretty technical and political and maybe you want to know about

some of the other things going on there. They have an incredibly beautiful piece of land. I loved it so much. On a clear day (most days were clear in the morning but not always clear enough) you can see islands in the Pacific Ocean from most of the lean-tos. There is a stream and an old dam. The stream has enough water for agriculture even in the dry season; they have plenty of water, including the 30 acres of agriculture they think they will one day have. There are two common meals a day: breakfast at ten (at the meeting) and lunch at four in the afternoon. Meals are mostly vegetarian, but there were two days when Marguerite prepared meat (rabbit one day and chicken the other). They are also talking about building ponds for aquaculture, which means growing fish. Actually the food tasted good for the most part, although a few dishes were questionable (This includes a salad I made one day that was bitter. I was embarrassed, but Marguerite said not to worry because the chickens would love it, and later, when I fed it to them, they did eat it all up).

Scott and Peter were trying to become cheese-makers; they were the most intent on starting businesses (this is probably because they have made the largest investments and don't want to lose money). Scott and Peter had cheese-making contests, and the residents were voting on how much credit Scott and Peter each received for the cheese-making. The better the cheese, the more labor units for the cheese. Scott was using fresh goat milk to make one kind of cheese that I did like; Peter was buying milk from a neighbor's cow (and talking about buying the whole cow) and making a cheese I did not like. Most people liked Peter's mozzarella-like cheese better, but, ironically, Peter and I liked Scott's hard, moldy goat cheese better.

Francine told me that Panama has a lack of good cheese, which is why Scott and Peter think it will be a good business.

They have maps describing plantings of hundreds of fruit and nut trees, as well as an oil palm plantation. They have also started growing these trees in their own small nursery, but all the trees are still in small containers.

There are some great people there, and I miss them, especially Francine and Marguerite. I actually miss Peter and Scott, too, although I never took the chance to get to know them. I guess I was scared. Now that I think about it, I miss all of them, and I definitely miss the land. It is a hundred acres of paradise.

The neighbors seemed nice. One day I tried out my Spanish with them and managed to talk a little about where I was from and so on. I think it's going to keep getting better for the farm, as they get more people who decide to stay, and more people who can be involved with their international exchange programs they are planning. All of them (8 semi-permanent or permanent residents) are European or American now, but they say they want to be more diverse than just that. I wish they could pay 2 or maybe even 5 dollars per unit of extra work, not 1 dollar. I only made 3 dollars while I was there.

I recommend it as a place to visit for anyone who wants to have an experience in the countryside, who wants to see what it's like to grow your own food and build your own buildings, and who wants to see what its like to start something new. If I was serious about living in the tropics, I'd give Abundance Farm some serious consideration. I'd probably go for a longer visit before making a decision. I learned a lot even in my brief visit. I had a lot of energy for it, and I'm good at getting to know new places quickly.

Manuel, a neighbor, 2012

Hello. I learned English from Maria at Finca Abundancia—at least how to write it, because I had to learn to speak it in the Canal Zone when I lived there for three years working for a retired American officer. I am Manuel. I have been the neighbor of Finca Abundancia for ten years, since Scott and Peter moved here. I am Panamanian. I have mostly Spanish blood, but some Indian on my mother's side. I am thirty years old. Several months a year I work at Finca Abundancia for money, but usually I don't because they prefer to employ residents.

I like the people there. There is nobody I hate. I did dislike one person, but he is gone now. They asked him to leave. He was always giving me and the neighbors bad looks and trouble. He left, so it's over now.

I am a laborer. Peter and Scott call me a handyman. I own my own house and live with my wife and two children. We have a TV, which is normal even for poor Panamanians now, but it is not normal at Finca Abundancia, where they have only one TV in the media room that they use for watching movies, sometimes movies they make at the farm. Also, there are some families in what they call the extended group who have TVs. But they are not the same as the Finca itself. They are neighbors and friends, like us.

People at Finca Abundancia sometimes meditate, but they don't pray much. This is what my priest says is atheistic, and so we know there is something different in the way they think about God and humans. I used to think it was because the people living there might have problems, but I don't see a lot of problems there, not more than what regular Panamanians have, so I think we're all just different.

Speaking of differences, there are a lot of different people who come to visit Finca Abundancia. They often arrive on the bus with someone from Finca Abundancia who has met them at the airport. Most people in the Panamanian countryside ride buses. The visitors to Finca Abundancia stay for a couple months, and they speak many languages and some of them dress even stranger than Peter and Scott, who dress very informally. Peter and Scott don't even buy new clothes when the old ones are worn out, even though they have so many dollars from the businesses. At least they know to wear long pants going to business meetings, which they didn't used to do, and some people from Finca Abundancia still don't do. I don't understand everything about how the Finca works. But Peter and Scott say they don't know either. They are good guys and funny.

My sister has graduated from Panama University, and so she understands better about Peter and Scott. She is helping them because she lives in Panama City and works for the government. She is helping with the international exchange program, because Panama has to accept foreign visitors. My sister knows about how to get the visas, and they pay her \$200 for each one.

I know that some neighbors think Finca Abundancia is different, because they aren't Catholics, only some of them speak Spanish, they eat a lot of salad and fruit and no rice and very little meat (Panamanians love rice and meat), they share possessions that we don't share together, and their businesses are not common, like the rubber business. Also, their marriages don't last long. They don't know how important marriage is. I

know how important marriage is because I have a wife and two kids. I love my family. When one marriage breaks up at Finca Abundancia, another one is always starting, and sometimes it is even with three people or with two women and no man. You can see why some neighbors think this is strange, because it's not like us. Scott and Peter actually agree with me about this.

But the Finca Abundancia residents think we are all the same. We have it as a joke now, "we are all the same." Scott and I laugh about it all the time, because Scott and I both talk about religion. We see how funny it is, the Finca and the people there. Even though he lives there, he knows about the values of the Catholic Church, because I think his parents knew better than the parents of some of their residents. That is what I tell my friends. We actually talk about Finca Abundancia a lot, but not as much as we talk about TV, our cows, America, Panama and the canal. Panama always was an important place, a land bridge between North and South America, but now it is becoming an important independent country, so we want to understand our country. I sometimes think we should join the United States, and so should the other countries here in Central America, but my sister disagrees because she says we are not ready. I say we will all learn. She tells me that I talk too much to Peter about human unity and that's my problem.

So you can see, Panamanians have our own disagreements. Speaking of Panamanians, now Peter is a Panamanian. He decided to become a resident, then to become a citizen. Most friends who stay at Finca Abundancia are legal residents or are crossing the border to Costa Rica every 6 months to get another tourist visa, but Peter decided to be a Panamanian. He said it will be pretty soon that he is a United States Citizen again, because he also thinks that Panama will be a state. We agree that having too many countries in the world is not easy for world politics. We are all Americans here, in North, Central, and South America, and we don't need to fight each other any more.

One great thing about Finca Abundancia is that the people there work hard and sweat. This is different from many of the gringos who live in Panama. Many of the gringos just drive big cars, build big houses, eat big meals and don't work. I'm a laborer, so I respect the hard work of residents at Finca Abundancia.

Although the residents of Finca Abundancia don't go to Church, my friends and I still respect their honesty and good intentions. They also sell good fruits and vegetables. I am glad to have them as friends and neighbors. Especially Scott and Peter and Maria. But anyone there is my friend.

Suzy, permanent child resident, 2015

I was seven years old when my family moved to Abundance Farm. Now I am fifteen. We had been homeschooling for two years already. My mom actually likes to call what we do unschooling. She likes to be a part of movements, especially rebellious movements that challenge "The Man." My mom is an amazing woman. She's important now at Abundance Farm. Her name is Katy. My Dad is Jim. I usually call them by their first names. Jim is important too, but I don't think he's as important. He runs the orchard. My mom runs the international exchange programs and also she is the Local Contact when there are issues concerning neighbors. My little brother Wolf is 12, three years younger than I am.

We had lived in Texas and Costa Rica before we moved here. Katy had been working on setting up her own community, but I think she was never meant to be the head person, just an important person - like the CFO or the COO of a company, but not the CEO. She isn't the kind of person who will start something, because she doesn't lead that way. She likes to be part of a group. So this is actually a perfect place for her because it's a group and it has an existing mission.

Katy doesn't like a few things about the place, usually related to Wolf and I, but I think she is over-reacting. For instance, she doesn't like it that she and Jim have to do more work per day (DMWR) than the other people, just because they have kids. Well, I see it the same as most of the others here. If parents have the right to choose to have kids, they should have to pay for it. On the other hand, if there were a society where the society made the choice, then the society would have to pay for it. I guess this is a difference in our political views.

There are a lot of people here at the community who like to learn and like to teach, and that makes it a great place to live. We moved into a lean-to as a family in the second year of the farm. Things were a lot more rustic back then, but as far as the personal dynamics, things haven't changed much. The new people are still usually confused, and it takes them a while to get to know the place, just like always. There are always some who declare love at first sight, just like always, and who end up hating it in the end, just like always. I did a study of them over the past twelve months and wrote about it, so I can speak with some level of authority on the subject.

Actually, I've been learning and watching a lot of the dynamics of the farm, and discussing and reading and writing about personal development, and group development, and agriculture, and if I may be so forward, I think I can write or speak with authority on pretty much any subject. Katy is proud of me that I can share my thoughts so freely and clearly. Sometimes I think she is envious. I am also starting to flower out as a beautiful woman, and I think that will be hard for her. She is not a young flower any more. But I love her, and I will always try to honor her - I think; it makes sense. I am just uncomfortable making commitments these days. It seems like when people make commitments, they end up exactly the opposite way. I am fascinated by this, and I can't find very much written about it. Peter says that he is also fascinated by it but thinks that it's better to not try to prove to the world some new facts about psychology because no one will understand. I don't agree. I think most people will not understand, but that's no

reason to quit. We have to stand for what makes sense to us.

Scott is my calculus teacher. Wolf is also in the class, and so is Scott's wife when she is around. Scott's daughter is only five but sometimes she comes to the class and copies what other people are doing but we all know she doesn't know what the class is about. Peter teaches music lessons and leads a type of psychological encounter game that is a cross between chess, psychotherapy, poetry, and karate. There are many more classes than this. All this teaching is just stuff some adults and even kids do as hobby in the afternoons when it is hot (dry season) or raining (rainy season). The afternoons are generally for the mind, whereas the mornings and sometimes the evenings are for work, here at Abundance Farm.

Marguerite is another one of the founders, and another one of my teachers, actually she teaches me literature. We are reading Spanish literature now, in Spanish. I like it alright. I'm the only one in the class. We like to meet in different parts of the farm, and sometimes in different towns, depending on what we are reading together, and we try to act out in real life or in play-acting the lines we are reading. It's a great game she invented, and the more complex the scene you are acting out, the more challenging it is to find a way to "fool" someone from the farm or town to play it with you. (They can't know that you are doing it.)

Scott is in charge of the energy business, including oil production here and in the lowlands, mostly palm oil but also some experimental plantings of other crops.

Until this year, my parents were doing extra work for me, because someone has to do the extra work for the kids, and here at the farm it's the parents of the particular kids who do it. But this year, I took on the DMWR for myself. It's only a half-share because I still live with my parents. Next year I will move into my own lean-to and work a full DMWR. Eighteen is an arbitrary age to move out. I am ready, although I'm only 15. I think I'll probably live here for another few years, and then spend some time traveling.

I participate in the meetings here when I want to. I work alongside everyone right now for units of labor, that I save up as cash. Together with cash from my parents' gifts and grandparents' and what I've earned, I already have \$8,000 of savings, \$5,000 of which is in stock in the corporation and \$3,000 of which is in cash because I want to use that for traveling in two years. When I say cash, actually this is a bank account with the corporation. We have our own bank here now. Some people think it is stupid because we can just use the bank in town, but one of the new people a couple years ago was formerly a banker and said we should try it for a couple years and evaluate the results, so that's why we have our own bank now. I am a full core-group resident, except it is a little complicated because my parents were still doing the extra work for me until recently and I still live with them.

Wolf has a lot of friends who are local Panamanians. He's always been more of the social type who gets along with people I am wont to judge. I don't have a lot of Panamanian friends. My friends are mostly adults at the farm. Some people say that girls mature more quickly. I am not into the biological-gender-predeterminism that permeates a lot of people here. I can refute most of their arguments; I think they are just justifying their own insecurities and hiding from their potential power.

I have spent a lot of time in the past several years reading and writing. I have pen pals from several countries, because so many people have come to visit us here. I like to send handwritten letters. I sometimes take the wonderful things about this place for

granted, but when the people who visit tell me about the places they live, I realize how blessed we are here.

Well, that is about all I have to say for now.

Gumbaza, a foreign guest, 2017

My name is Gambuza. I am from Mali. I am a friend of Abundance Farm. I am thirty years old. I am an educated African man. My country is very poor. I traveled to Panama to spend six months at Abundance Farm when I was twenty years old. Then I returned one year later to stay for two years to learn more about their happiness and also about their businesses, like growing African oil palm, avocados, and cashews, making biodiesel and goat cheese, and producing free-range chicken eggs. I am a Christian. My family has roots in the Christian and Muslim and Voodoo traditions. I now have a wife and one daughter. I learned about Abundance Farm through my Christian Church, Jehovah's Witness. It was the generosity of Jehovah's Witness that sent me to Panama. Now I am an elder here in a new branch of the church, and I pray to God that I can help others in the way that God has helped me in this life. I do not just speak of some special things in the eyes of other people, like my visits to Panama and learning how to make biodiesel. I am also speaking of being moved by God, because it was God that came into my heart when I was eighteen and brought me to the church through my friends who witnessed to me, and who showed me the path, the life. And it was God who answered my prayers when my mother was ill, but most importantly it was God who is in my heart each day now and allows me to see the beauty in everything that exists.

I wanted to go to Panama to learn about God's world. I knew when I applied that I might not get the visa to travel to Panama or be accepted to stay at the farm, but I knew it did not matter. Because God has many ways he works, which I had learned from my Brothers in the church. And my kind English-speaking brothers were also teaching me how to speak their language. This was good, because English is one of the most common languages in the world today.

When I traveled to Panama the first time, the project was only in its third year. I was learning to read and write English, but I was not proficient. So, I also spent time before going and in Panama learning how to read and write. I chose to not learn any Spanish the first time, because I did not think it was as important as English. When I was there the first time, the residents tried to learn Spanish by using it in daily life. There was usually a translation at every meeting so that English and Spanish were the two official languages. Later, on my second visit, they were no longer doing the translation at meetings. So I missed my chance to learn Spanish, except for a few phrases, because I never paid attention to the Spanish the first time.

Like I said, I wanted to focus learning on how to read and write in English, but I did not understand that I would have to be working at the same time. I had received the written description about Abundance Farm and discussed it with my Brothers from the church, but still I had not understood, which was embarrassing to me. I was almost a little angry when I arrived, because I did not want to work six days a week, but then I realized everyone was working, and so I thought it was selfish of me to want to be so privileged. And when I prayed, God said this same thing, so I worked. My job the first time was building roads, which I didn't know how to do at first, but it was about moving rocks and soil and digging so I could do the work, I just didn't know about the details of how to make the roads able to stand up to long-term use with a rainy season. I learned

that as I was working, and now we also build roads sometimes like that here in Mali, but most people prefer to wait for the government to do it here in Mali. Still, I can use those skills, even the road-building skills.

I think my work with the Church and my travel to Panama have both been very important in helping me to become a leader here in Mali, but not as important as learning to listen to God. Abundance Farm had ways of working together in meetings and in work to help us think about how we felt and what we wanted, all of which are now a part of how I see the world, and a part of how I lead inside the church and outside in daily life. In fact, I see Abundance Farm as being a type of Jehovah's Witness family, because many times I see the parallels between the early Church, as described in Paul's letters, and their practices. But most people at Abundance Farm don't agree, and would not accept they are following in the path of Christ. Finally, some of them agreed to read some of Paul's letters with me and realized they should not be so reactive, but they still will not claim to be Christians. They are still my friends though, and they have in their own ways helped me learn about my mission and about Christ's mission and the ways that were set out to organize the Church and relationships.

Most were actually more open to learning about my history as an African and a Muslim and with voodoo, than they were about Christianity, although their culture is the one that has the stronger direct Christian heritage. This I still do not understand. There were some exceptions to this, since some people at Abundance Farm had a stronger connection to Christ.

I was not used to the food that they served—mostly uncooked leaves, all kinds of fruits I did not know, a few nuts, and a strange grain called popcorn that pops open when you heat it. But it was very impressive how much they grew on their own. And on my second visit, I spent time learning about all the daily activities and working with the gardeners and the farmers in the cashew and avocado orchards, the goat cheese making, and their 2 year old African oil palm plantation in the lowlands. I also spent a month at the small biodiesel factory (just another lean-to now, but they are trying to get a World Bank loan for a bigger factory). Now, they are using palm oil purchased from the big Costa Rican plantations just over the border and shipping the processed biodiesel to the United States, but they hope to get other farmers to establish more sustainably-managed plantations in Panama. They also want to have Panamanians use biodiesel in diesel vehicles, but Scott says we will have to be patient for the regular diesel to become more expensive before that happens.

Later when I returned to Mali, I was inspired to create something here like what they have created there, but it has not happened yet. I tried with the help of the Church. But I could not do it. I did not have the strength or the funds to maintain the mission on my own, because I was dedicated to other projects. I don't eat as healthy now as I would like to, and I know many of my fellow people here eat even less healthy diets than mine. It is part of my dream, to have a physically nourished people, though it is second to my dream to have a spiritually nourished people. I think I am getting closer to being able to support the development of the healthier agriculture and diet here. In fact, I think our diet is not as bad as what I have seen in America. But yes, we will get better.

Buddy, an extended group permanent resident, 2010

My name's Buddy. I'm an American, born in Panama in the Canal Zone. My father was in the military as a maintenance man, and my mother was a nurse practitioner in Panama City. I'm forty years old and have been living at the farm since a month after it was founded five years ago. I've spent most of my life in Panama, with the exception of some vacations back in the states with my family. My parents are still alive, but they picked up and moved back to Southern California when the canal was turned over to the Panamanians in '99. Jimmy Carter signed a treaty to do that back in '77, when I was just a small boy.

Abundance Farm is my home. I care about the people, I care about the land, and I care about the country. I don't think I'll ever want to leave, but it's surely a lot different from the home where I was raised. Partly that is why I decided a year ago to buy my own piece of land and build my own house in the extended group zone. But I still work at the farm. My wife Maria lives in the core group area, but I like to have her spend the night with me, of course. Maybe she'll move out here to my place someday.

I'm writing this from my desk. I own my own desk. I own my own land. I own my own computer. I even have my own garden. It's the first time I've had my own place. I still have a strong connection to the farm, and like I said, the whole place is my home, but this piece right here, this land, this is my home in another way, and I am proud of the way I live here, as well as the way we all live here. I'll tell you the story about how I got here.

I had been driving a medical supply truck every day, from Panama City to some local communities. I had been doing it for a couple years. I don't have a college degree like a lot of the people here, and I'd been more or less satisfied with my job. (But I do speak better Spanish than most of them!) I was driving the truck in early 2005 west of David on the Pan-Am when I had a flat tire. It turned out that my spare didn't fit, so I called the company on my cell phone, and they sent out somebody to fix the truck. I waved down the next truck that came by, so I could get into town and hang out there, rather than on the hot, dusty road. That truck I flagged down was a red Toyota pickup. Scott was driving. I asked him for a lift down the road to the bus stop, and that's how we first got to talking.

He told me all about this farm, mostly a lot of dreams and talk then, as I would soon see. They didn't have a lot of experience with some of the basic stuff like even how to build buildings. But they had some money, and they were doing it. Scott said I could come by when I had a chance, and he'd show me around, and then he dropped me off at the main part of town. He was going to the internet place in David, since the farm had no internet at the time; in fact, they didn't even have a phone. He was also picking up some supplies from the hardware store.

Anyhow, I didn't think much more of what he said for a couple weeks until one day I found myself way ahead of schedule with my deliveries and in that general part of the country. So, I took a detour and stopped by the farm. Well, I say it was a farm, but there wasn't much here then. They had one lean-to they were living in, another broken down building where they had slept for the first two weeks while they were building the

lean-to, and they had some chicks wandering around, looking to be eaten up by critters. That was about it. There were three of them: Peter, Scott, and Marguerite. Although, when I pulled in, the only one there was Peter, sitting in the shade of a tree and reading a book called *The Inferno* by Dante. Marguerite and Scott were out on a walk together, figuring out the lay of the land, Peter said. Got to wonder what that means. I explained that I'd met Scott, and Peter said he knew all about it, and he said I was welcome there, and he'd be happy to show me around, which he did. He was a pretty young guy and talked like he was a cross-breed of woods kid and professor, a slang country accent peppered with lots of uncommon words. I could make out his good intention, because I've known all types.

I'm the type that can get along pretty well with anyone. Also, it doesn't matter what goes wrong, because it never seems so bad to me. I know how to put up a building and take care of it, and I can keep a car running like it was new. Peter was on top of all that right away and he said that, if I wanted, I could come spend a couple months at the place with them and help fix up some buildings. I said it wasn't quite my scene, which it wasn't, because my job in Panama City was working fine for me. But I decided these guys were alright, and so one other time I also came by with my tools and not only did I fix the fan in Scott's truck, which he hadn't fixed even after 2 years of it being broken, but I also put together a windmill for them. They gave me lunch and a couple bucks (not even enough to cover my gas money). But it was fine, because I enjoyed myself there. And that was the beginning of a long friendship.

I've never been much of a reader, but I do keep track somewhat of the news, especially on the radio, and I never did like the way some things were going in the world, nor even in Panama with the politics and that whole Noriega thing. Well, what Peter and Scott and Marguerite would talk about sounded to me like it made a lot more sense than some of what I was hearing on the news. They talked about the oil and the energy issues, but they were talking about it by talking about *their* role in creating the problems, not blaming everyone else. So I respected that, and every two or three weeks I checked back up on them and lent a hand when I could. This went on more or less for about a year. During that time, some other people joined, and lots of people came and went. By the end of the year, ten people were living here more or less permanently, and one of them was Maria, who's from Argentina originally, who, as I said, is my wife now. Well, I don't know if it was because of what they all talked about or whether it was my gut feeling or Maria being there, but I found myself coming down more and more often and by this time I'd also read some of the books and brochures they'd put together.

Now let me just say that I've always voted Republican, and that I've always voted. I reckon part of the reason I've always voted Republican is because my parents always voted Republican. Like I said, I was born back before Carter decided to give away the Canal, and it always seemed my parents knew what they were talking about in their criticisms of the liberals. Though I've always thought about what I do, I'd never questioned their judgment on the party. Well, I think in this respect I don't fit in with some of the others here, but with time I am seeing more and more that I might have been overlooking some things. Although I still voted Republican in 2008, I did it after thinking through a lot of the issues from a new perspective, and I still think it was the right choice. As you can see, my language is becoming a little more refined, as some of the people around here might say. I reckon that's what happens when you read more of

the intellectual stuff.

I'd saved up \$15,000 over quite a few years of working in Panama, and with Scott and Peter owning most of the land through a corporation, I trusted them but wasn't sure if I wanted to invest my money the way they did. I have still kept most of it in safe investments like bonds and mutual funds, until I bought this land here one year ago.

So, back to 2006. I was coming down here more and more often. I was starting to get more and more fond of Maria. I don't know what it was about us that sparked it off, because, as she says, she had always liked Latinos. I'd never thought seriously that I'd have a girlfriend who lived on a farm. My parents had worked on a farm in California's Central Valley before they came to the Canal Zone. I'd heard about farm life from them, a lot of experiences they talked about but didn't want to live through again.

Well, later that year I was at the farm. By that time there were fifteen, twenty people here most of the time. And there were these long meetings near the middle of the day. Everybody would start eating at ten and just talk and talk and talk and talk. Especially the women, just talk and talk and talk. Maria liked it, but I didn't. Occasionally, I'd sit with her through an entire meeting, because she said it was part of her, and she wanted me to get to know her as fully as possible. I didn't talk much, but I do have to say, she was right, it was a good idea for me to have spent that time in some of those meetings. Still, I only did this every few weeks, so I don't know how they did it every day! I learned a lot about her. And actually, it was at one of those meetings when Maria brought up the idea in front of everyone that she wanted me to live at the farm.

I was a little irritated and embarrassed at first, not too sure about having myself talked about. Maria had mentioned this to me before, but I thought it was a bit too early for her to be bringing it up in the group. I was pretty sure I didn't want to move into the group, and I'd already known at that time of the option of the extended group space and buying my own land nearby. Plus there was always the option of her moving in with me in the city, which I later brought up with her but that didn't fly at all.

To make a long story short, the people in the meeting said they liked me a lot, and all the women thought I would be a good influence on the other men (they didn't know about my politics, for the most part, they could just see that I knew how to shave and treat a lady with respect). I felt kind of touched by the whole thing. The men didn't say much, but I knew they didn't object. I never would have said it at the time, but maybe a few of them were jealous of Maria and me. Now, I sometimes bring up those kinds of feelings with people here.

I still wasn't sure, but later on, around September of 2006, I just went on my gut feeling and popped the question to Maria, but I didn't let her answer before I told her I wanted to give the farm a chance and would move in after the rainy season. I gave my notice to my landlord and my job, and I did move in early 2007 into a one-person lean-to I had built myself in the months leading up to that. Actually, I even got paid a little for my work building that lean-to. I was a bit skeptical of the lean-to as a dwelling but on the other hand I didn't want to be the black sheep, and I went along with it. Maria stayed in her place for the next six months, and eventually we moved into a place together.

Around the time I moved here, people besides myself were also concerned about the huge amount of meeting time, and so, lucky for me, we voted to separate the meetings, to have one meeting for the touchy-feely things and another for the business

things. We always made sure to have a good leader for the business meetings so we could get stuff done.

When I first moved in, there was a daily minimum work requirement (DMWR) of five units a day. Every day, all week. The DMWR had recently been raised, the reason being all the work that had to be done and not a lot of money to pay people. The cheese business was just starting to get moving. We had a lot of goats but not a way to milk them quickly, yet. We were experimenting a lot with new types of businesses and trees and plants, so there was a lot to do. I actually was pretty picky about some of my work. I didn't want to do farm work. I was ok building and fixing things, but I didn't want to mess around with the animals or in the gardens or fields. I did do the dishes every day for a half-hour. I basically did my DMWR every day, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less. There were some people, and there still are, who work way more than their DMWR, but they get paid for that extra work. In fact, it's a little complicated because if you have a kid, you've got a higher DMWR to begin with, one extra hour per day. But we have a policy here that "core group residents" aren't supposed to be owning too much stuff or spending too much money or using too much resources, so at that time, I was basically just living. I had a lot more free time than I'd ever had before. I was earning less money, basically, no money. Well, it was no big deal, all my expenses were covered, I was in love, and Maria and I got married that year. People respected my work, and my work got to be where it was generally at "par plus 50" or "par plus 100" which meant an hour was worth 1.5 or 2 units. So I built a lot of the lean-tos they have down there, and I put together most of the water system (I am still in charge of it.)

A year after I moved in, I took a good hard look at the farm. And I had gained a lot from it. Maria and I were living in the same lean-to at this time. We were thinking of having a baby. She was almost 30. Well, we still are thinking of it, we're almost at the point of making the decision now. I think actually living outside in the extended group might even be a better way to raise a family than being in the core group. So I was pretty pleased with the place and the people. I had my reservations, about the amount of contact and the meetings, but a lot of those concerns were things I could deal with, and also I appreciated the extra time, during which I'd found a love for learning, and Maria has been teaching me Italian (I'm hoping to read some of that Dante one of these days). It was 2008 when Maria and I were talking about all this. I had the title of Maintenance Supervisor, which actually wasn't about supervision but more just doing what had to be done. That was basically my whole job at the farm, that and the dishes. It still is my job, but now I do some supervision, because one of the new guys at the community is my Maintenance Peon! So it was in 2008 when I started thinking seriously about this place as my home. And I invested \$5,000 of my money in the corporation. Plus I started talking with people about buying one hectare in the back, which is here, where I'm writing this in my new house.

Growing up, it was always my mother who made the decisions about where we'd live and where we'd go to school, that is, when there were decisions to be made. My father did his job; and up until I moved in here I am ashamed to admit I was still working in a job my mother told me would be good for me and living at an apartment she found for me. So I was never a grown-up man. I don't know quite what Maria saw in me, but she knew I wasn't perfect and yet knew I could be. I guess that's part of why I loved her for sure, because she believed in me, that I could be my own person, while I just fooled

else. They didn't understand the truth, that I was still just a momma's boy.

So I was excited about having my own place, not just putting up the building the way other people thought it would look good, the way they drew it up, on a piece of land they thought up. I wanted to pick my own land, and to draw my own house. I can't believe I'm saying this, because although I was totally capable of building a dozen houses according to other people's specifications, I still had never made a decision about what I thought I would like a house to be. Maria said she understood, and she said that she wanted me to design the house so it could be for our family, although she still wasn't sure herself whether she would want to move in there or just stay living with the core group. It was important to her, important in a different way than for me. For her, it was her chance to be part of something she believed in. For me, it was a chance to be myself, who I believed myself to be. Do you see the difference? She had never been able to fit in to anything. She had always been special, different, smart, more critical and yet also more proactive. Here she found the people who respected her and who understood her. For me, I had always fit in anywhere. The question was, who the heck was I? So it's got a lot to do with finding out what we have always longed for. Peter says sometimes, "We long to have, and enjoy, what we always had as a child, and also what we never had but always wanted. We might as well figure out what those things are." And it makes sense.

I eventually wanted to buy this one hectare piece, and we decided it would cost \$7,000. I bought it with cash from the bank that I'd been saving. So now I own this piece, I own this house I've built (it cost \$2,000 for materials) and the computer and furniture (\$500) so I have just \$500 left in the bank. But I've got another chunk of stock in the company, which is now worth about \$6,000 and so that's working well.

I work a couple hours a day, five days a week, at the farm, and that covers my use of their laundry machine, all my food there, and any use of their other facilities. What I want to do now is start my own business. Maria and I have been talking about it. It's nothing special, just maintenance and carpentry. But I've got the skills, and she says I can do it, and I think I can do it. I don't know how long I'll want to do it, because it just seems like a lot of work to be selling myself all the time. I'm trying to just be more honest with people, not try to sell myself. Maria says my work will speak for itself. I don't know. Maybe in the next few weeks, I'll start to get some jobs, and if everything is going well in the next year, Maria and I will get to work on that baby we've been talking about. There's no place I'd rather be than here, and there's no place I'd rather raise my son or daughter, than here. I love my life.

Leah, an investor, 2020

I first met Peter in 2003. I think that was when he first started getting serious about this project. I'm glad that we've been able to keep in touch since then. And I'm also glad I've been able to have some level of involvement with the project that fits in with my family. I met Peter because I got on his email list somehow, I think because we had a friend in common and Peter just spammed a lot of people with his ideas. I wrote back one time, and then one day we met up in Central Park when we both happened to be in New York City. We're about the same age. At first it was one of the most bizarre interactions I had ever experienced. Peter is psychologically complex and powerful, and I am too, so we immediately hit it off - sometimes with the tension of adversaries, sometimes with the pleasure of good friends, and a few times, even cutting off our friendship because it was too confusing and we thought we might be enemies.

In late 2003, Peter started talking about the possibilities for investing money in ways that supported his values. His values are not a perfect match with mine, but they are a lot closer than what I see in mainstream society. I told Peter right away that I might be interested in participating as an investor, which we knew would complicate our friendship. And it has complicated our friendship. But there's rarely anything without a shadow side. Maybe never.

When Peter and Scott first put together the corporation in late 2004, I was getting cold feet about the situation, partly because I still didn't know Peter that well, partly because my family had taken an odd distrust to him, and partly because it was just a departure from the way I had invested up to that point. I actually had several million dollars even back then, thanks to a hard-working and brilliant father, and I had always followed the family tradition of diversifying in equity in my own home plus several mutual funds chosen by a family friend. I did read the books Scott and Peter put together in 2004, and it actually reassured me that I should go with my original gut instinct and put some money on the table too. Peter said it was fine if I didn't want to, or also fine if I wanted to start small. Peter initially put in \$100,000 and Scott (who I hadn't met until later) put in \$25,000; I decided to put in what was small change for me, \$25,000. It didn't make a lot of difference to me or to the corporation financially, but for some reason I thought it was something I wanted to try. It felt just as safe an investment as the stock market, but obviously would be less liquid. And I would have the opportunity to compare what it was like for me to try investing not only with the goal of financial security/gain, but also to support the development of what I value in this world. And I do value human unity, and I do value land conservation, and I do value sustainability, and I do value developing mature relationships to our assets where we have contact to those underlying assets - not through layers of indirection, but as directly as possible.

I tried to keep in the loop with Peter and Scott, but for the most part they were doing their own thing in the early years. They wrote an annual report, and I voted on the officers. In fact I was officially on the board of directors for the first three years, although I didn't ever attend a meeting. The board only met once a year, and always in Panama. I didn't even see the pieces of land they considered buying; only after they had bought land did I see the property (I saw the land in mid-2005, six months after they had

bought it).

When I first saw the land, it was not in very good shape. They had bought a lot of land - several hundred acres - with good accessibility, only a kilometer from a paved road, and with good water. But only 10 acres were good for agriculture, and only of moderate fertility. The rest seemed rocky and infertile, at least to me. They agreed. Well, I worked through my concerns. It was hard, I wanted their project to be perfect, to have no holes in execution, for their land to be the best land in Central America, and for Abundance Farm to immediately be productive in several businesses. I was tough on myself and on them at first, at least on the emotional side. In my mind, I had set aside a five-year time horizon for them to develop the project, the philosophy, the personnel, and the businesses. I knew it could take several years before it would “look” like I had made a smart investment to other people. It was just hard to wait through those several years. And my family gave me a lot of pressure about it, especially my husband, who I think had to work through the way I respect him, and yet also respected Peter in a different way.

I had always had some interest in projects like this, but my husband didn't. And we liked our jobs and being near our families in the northeast. So I had never considered living at the farm in Central America. But we did visit - first in 2005 I visited alone, then in 2006 and 2007 and 2008 I visited with my family. When I visited, it felt a bit awkward. It had to. I was a shareholder, I was on the board, I was rich (the wealthiest person there, I suspect), and I was used to working for \$300 per hour as a management consultant even at 30 years old. But, according to the way things were set up, when I got there I was working the Daily Minimum with my labor valued at about a dollar an hour for washing dishes and harvesting vegetables. Oh, and I did get to work for “par plus 50” on a writing project one time describing my relation to the project as an investor, which they posted on their website abundancefarm.com.

Actually, it was good for me to do those visits, usually two weeks each. As I've mentioned, I was anxious at the time about wanting for our project to show results. Peter said to me, “We can either have results, or the appearance of results, or some combination, but there are a lot of times when we do have to choose. What do you want our priority to be?” He was right. I did also donate several thousand dollars each year to the initial development of the international exchange programs, which was matched by Peter and also by one other anonymous person, and with those funds we brought in several small groups of adults and children from Russia, Ukraine, Kenya, and Thailand. I tried to get my visits to the community in the early summer to coincide with the end of the visits from the 3-month and 6-month exchange programs. I guess it was the privilege of being a sponsor that I could influence schedules. It worked out.

Peter has always been a complicated type of leader. Sometimes he will forge out a complete plan for everyone to follow, complete with an organizational chart, directives, timelines, and budgets. Sometimes he'll come to a meeting with all this prepared and ask to run the meeting and run it, and everything happens just like he planned. Sometimes, though, he won't prepare any of this stuff. He'll just come to a meeting and say nothing and do nothing. Maybe someone else will have prepared, maybe someone else will ask to take a few days off to prepare proposals for the group, sometimes the meetings will just degenerate into nothingness. He seems to want everyone to experience different types of situations and to be conscious of what they are observing, how it affects them,

and a range of possible interpretations and reactions to that situation. So he both models that and gives people the space to do that. Even back in 2004, this was obvious. He would sometimes come into groups with the international exchange folks and run a workshop. Here's an example of what I remember from 2007.

What we tried to do back then was to get the exchange programs from two different countries happening at once. In 2007, there was a group of 2 teachers and 4 students from Kenya, and also a group of 1 teacher and 5 students from Ukraine. The students were all high-school students and spoke some English when they arrived. Peter had never explained this proposal of having groups from two countries at once; he just did it. So he came to one of these meetings, and there were these 12 guests from Kenya and Ukraine (who were officially "core group residents" according to the farm bylaws). There were also 4 permanent residents, and my husband and I were also there. This was Peter's week to be in charge of the afternoon meetings of the international exchange programs. When we got to the stage/gazebo (which had been chosen because it had a roof and those days it was raining most afternoons), Peter was sitting up on a table. He seemed like he was meditating. Everybody came into the room and sat down respectfully around the room.

Peter never said a word the whole hour, but here's what happened - one by one, he went around the room and played with everyone. Sometimes he mimicked them, mirroring them with giggles and gestures. Sometimes he danced with them. Sometimes he tried to entice them to come and dance. (He later explained to me that it was an experiment and exercise developing comfort and consciousness of emotional and physical states - by seeing one's own states mirrored in another person, Peter.) Then, halfway through the hour, he just went to the side of the stage and lay down and went to sleep. Everyone else, who had been following and watching, found themselves wondering what he wanted them to do. I think I know what he wanted - he wanted us to take charge, for someone to take charge; he wanted for people to learn to transfer leadership, and to be leaders. I decided to do it. But I was going to have fun, too. So what I did was I told one of the kids from Ukraine that she had to be the leader for the rest of the hour, and that she would have to select what to do. She was from a school and culture where she wasn't used to that, but she'd been at the farm for 6 months and so she was catching on. And she decided that everyone got to tickle Peter, and there was a contest to see who could make him laugh most quickly. I was hoping to win, but I didn't. So that was one time, in terms of Peter's leadership, which demonstrates both the way he was able to take charge and also the way he can disappear into nothingness.

Before I became involved in my minimal way with the farm, I tended to believe that a country or a company could achieve results like education or efficiency by legislation. I righteously voted Democrat, and I supported the teachers' union and educational research and funding. But I learned how important personalities are through my work with the farm. They never believed their project could be replicated exactly, or possibly even at all; they believed that to the extent they could be replicated, it would be because personalities were able to develop their own philosophies and skills, not because there was an external methodology that could be adhered to. Now I still usually vote Democrat, but I have a lot more questions about how to make education departments work, or whether they can work at all.

Well, as it turns out, their communities have been somewhat replicable. I'd like

to take some credit for that, because I pushed for it to be a priority. Peter had some concerns that if the project aimed too much to save the world, to get caught up in success, it would interfere with just living life. I told him he could buy back my shares if he didn't like having a difference of opinion, but that my values were that the farm should set up a program formally inviting people from around the world to consider starting their own communities on a similar model. Well, we actually didn't talk about it much after that; he never offered to buy back my shares, and the very next year (this was in 2012 I think) there was a conference along the lines I had suggested. I do know that Peter has always admired Ayn Rand's book *Atlas Shrugged* and imagined himself as a John Galt, able to recruit the best people from places they are not helping the world and convince them to join his projects. And I think he has taken it upon himself to do just that, and that is probably one of the main reasons the other communities have gotten started.

By 2015, the farm had grown to 1000 acres, with 120 residents, although only half of those were permanent, and, of the permanent residents, only half of those were core group residents. There were 60 shareholders at the time, each with between \$500 and \$100,000 of original investment, each valued at the time between \$600 and \$200,000. I don't know whether we were correct in our valuations then. It's so hard to value things.

We always did have tensions about the relative wages paid to different people. Some people, like Peter and Scott and Marguerite and now Lucinda and Katy and Jim, have such experience there and vision and they are able to do things in their jobs that other people just can't do. And we've always wanted people to be compensated in relation to their contribution. So those people do get a lot of units per hour for some of the work they do, well, if you consider 10 units per hour to be a lot. Lucinda's the only one of those who is not in the core group - she lives in her own house in the extended group - she actually gets to spend the money she earns. But as for the rest of the management, they are in the core group. While they do get those funds if they work the hours, they can't use them for the kinds of consumption most people in the world use their salaries. But to what extent do those people in management work for their own good as shareholders, versus their own good as employees, versus their own good as residents? There's no perfect answer to those questions, I'm sorry to say. I used to think maybe there were some systematic solutions to this. But there aren't. There's a shadow side to everything. We try to be aware of it, and we discuss it every year publicly, which is something the typical corporations never do, and we think about it consciously, and we do our best, but at least we try to keep it transparent. We've always tried to keep everything transparent: budgets, relationships, motivations. And we've done pretty well - it's mostly them. I just like to take the credit because I liked to use the word transparency and now it's stuck with them. I am down there for two weeks a year still, and I can pick up what is going on because the nature of the attitude is to be open to that. There are companies I go into these days, and I have to use a lot of trickery to get the most basic information about how they work. It's not like that at Abundance Farm. What you see is what you get.

Financially speaking, I did invest some more money with the group. In 2009 I underwrote a purchase of 500 acres with a mortgage and a 5-year balloon payment for a price of \$500,000. This is where they planted 100 acres of rubber trees that after 3 years were netting enough to pay off the balloon payment, which they paid back, and which

funds I then used to purchase additional stock in the corporation from some shareholders who wanted liquidity. Since then, I haven't invested another dime, and I haven't taken out any money. My total investment is now valued at about \$1 million, which is not a spectacular return financially, but then again it's not all that bad either. Maybe best of all, it has let me have a congruency in my assets. I don't need to lie to other people or myself or close my eyes about the assets I control in this world. I know what they are doing. I have seen several of my friends becoming more involved with having a portion of their assets invested in similar operations. But I know that my friends have been swayed by my choices. And financial markets and systems are slow to change, but I think the way they are changing in response to me and the people I've been involved with at Abundance Farm is significant.

There are now, in 2020, 10 other communities that exist claiming to be inspired by Abundance Farm. Their initial capital and operating expenses are funded in a variety of ways. They have a variety of different priorities, but they all value environmental conservation, sustainability, and human unity. These 10 are the survivors of probably 1000 that were discussed and 100 where two or more people actually put some money down and tried to start something. I've been to several of them, and I'm proud of the lifestyles being lived there. I've suggested to several of my kids that they can go spend time at those communities instead of college, and that it might be more educational. They scoffed at it at first, but now that the first two are in college (at 15 and 16), they actually have both chosen to take a year off because they are disgusted with what they have found there. I don't know whether they'll go to the Centers on their own (of course they've been with my husband and I), but I hope they do go.

As Peter said to me once, "Feeling meaningful is when we have integrated thought and action - when we do what we think we should, and when we think about the things that are relevant to our lives." It's great work. We've done well.

Ecology and the Role of Humans

It's natural to develop stories that help explain our origins. This is the story I (Scott) sometimes tell myself before I go to bed at night. It's based partly on a story told by Jared Diamond in "Guns, Germs, and Steel," some other readings, and a little personal synthesis.

For a long time, humans and our forebears lived on this earth as hunter-gatherers without having a major effect on ecosystems. They foraged by eating leaves, fruits, roots, stems, seeds, and assorted animals, from insects to mammoths. Plant seeds spread through feces and, eventually, through some intentional scatterings.

Fire became employed to change vegetation patterns and favor certain plant species, as well as for hunting strategy. By steering ecosystems with fire towards grasslands where forest would exist otherwise, humans increased the amount of edible biomass for large grazing animals (only termites have figured out a way to eat wood, but only with the help of protozoa in their gut). Some large animals may have gone extinct on account of the human pressure, especially in places like America and Australia where humans suddenly appeared on the scene and less time existed for co-evolution of prey and the human creative intelligence.

One role of humans in ecosystems was to regulate animal "health" by removing the individuals less fit to perform their role well. Humans were also partly responsible for continued co-evolution of plant species, increasing the densities of species providing greater edible portions for animals, unconsciously and consciously. These two effects on ecosystems were the human purpose.

What we accomplished for the larger system in turn served us well. Joy, ecstasy, pleasure, etc all became side effects of the process of natural selection, as those happier to live and to accomplish these purposes in small human groups gave more offspring. All natural happiness were connected to actions that led to greater human survival, such as desire to be appreciated by the group (leading to continual, personal sacrifices for the group, fulfillment of the desire, and release of happiness inducing biochemicals). Another example was the strong desire for fats and sugars, as these are rare substances in the wild extremely valuable to biology (of course, at the right dose), leading to selection of humans who experienced great pleasure eating fats and sugars.

About 10,000 years ago, humans started spreading seeds in the Fertile Crescent and harvesting and eating high carbohydrate seeds like never before. Cooking developed as the main way to make seeds more digestible. Animals were domesticated for meat and milk. Humans introduced mechanical soil disturbance to favor the growth of plants that produced an abundance of large seeds rather than vegetative growth. Animals were domesticated for traction and transport. Sedentary lifestyles developed with large, preservable food surpluses. Independent domestication of plants in many places around the world resulted in subsequent annihilation of hunter-gatherer cultures around the world. Domestication of plants continued, extending into purposes other than taming seeds high in carbohydrates, aiming to tame plants for fibers, oils, medicine, fruits, and vegetables.

Greater social complexity, and technology emerged as a result of not having to

employ the whole population in the search for food but for novel purposes that strengthen the sedentary group. Farmers fed the social elite who didn't work the land but provided leadership and codification of morals and ethics useful to continued survival and expansion of agricultural societies. Specialists who manufactured goods or provided other services were also fed by farmers. Material accumulation resulted from having a home with storage space, as opposed to having to carry everything in your hands as a hunter-gatherer. Networks to privilege emerged because fathers and mothers want to leave something behind for their offspring. Private property rights emerged as way to protect the right to benefit from land improvements, as well as nobility and kings who protected those rights in reciprocal exchange with landowner's taxes and military service. Societies with strong work ethics had advantage in the conflicts for power. Crowd diseases emerged, many passed from domesticated animals who had these diseases as controls on their large herds in the wild.

Complex civilizations rose and fell, perhaps because of failures to develop sustainable agriculture and loss of faith in the priesthood as a result of failing crops. Intellectuals intensified the development of mental models of reality, initiated formal, secret societies for mutual critique and sharing of ideas and experimental results. Royal courts funded these scientists to develop new warfare technologies and to find processes to turn base metals into gold, leading to the development of chemistry and modern medicine. Fossil fuels were discovered and tapped for energy use. Technologies and lifestyles feeding off these novel sources of energy rose in importance.

Loss of local agricultural knowledge occurred, particularly over the past hundred years, as the majority of humans moved to cities to take advantage of the abundances related to the huge supply of stored energy cheaply available. Military might of the new fossil-fuel-based societies increased exponentially, as did population, resource use, and environmental impact. Global manufacturing networks offer basic and novel goods, promoted as crucial to social status and human happiness through advertising, replaced home and community based self-sufficiency. Novel threats of complete planetary annihilation emerged with the development of nuclear technologies, and biological/chemical warfare. Global communication networks grew to coordinate military entities in times of war and trading entities in times of peace. Information generated by research and the human economies continues to proliferate and the word sustainability emerges as a way to describe something life has always striven for, although mostly unconsciously.

Can we develop a sustainable, mostly sedentary way of living from solar energy? It's a still a young, 10,000 year old experiment/play, and we are pleased to be part of it. We intend to play our part consciously and actively.

A mental model of the world

We can view the environment in three categories: undisturbed nature (wilderness), disturbed nature (farms), and the human-built environment (buildings, pants, computers, pens, factories). The goal of our project is to preserve the undisturbed nature, improve the management and stewardship of the disturbed nature, and to either

create or utilize a built environment that has a beneficial effect on disturbed nature. Wherever we can reduce our dependence on disturbed nature and return it to an undisturbed state, we will. The ideal, however, is to have disturbed nature and the human-built environment work as well or better than undisturbed nature. Working in this case means efficient use of water, improvement of soil quality, complete nutrient cycling on site, low non-renewable energy subsidies, and zero toxic emissions.

Within disturbed nature, our primary activities include forestry, fisheries, and agriculture. Management concerns are sustainable use of soil, water, nutrients, biomass, energy, and human labor. Farming and forestry can be viewed as a process of disturbing the environment in order to obtain a greater proportion of food or materials than would be provided without human initiated disturbance. Analysis of hunter-gather cultures has shown population densities of about 1 per square mile, as opposed to 1 per acre on self-sufficient farms in Asia or 1 per quarter acre in intensive, vegetarian gardens or 1 per .0064 acres for a cityslicker with a major non-renewable fuel subsidy.

The objectives of agriculture are to provide nutritious, tasty foods with the minimum amount of agricultural and food processing work, and to enhance the possibilities for all life. We recognize that making money can also be a part of this, but we prefer not to view that as the end result. While we do plan to cultivate some crops that require processing to be edible (eg. popcorn, yucca, cashews, a small amount of flour corn³, beans), we will devote the majority of our time to fruits and vegetables that can be eaten in the field. Indeed, we think it is valuable to develop an agriculture neither based primarily on eating seeds produced by annuals with high carbohydrate levels (corn, wheat), nor reliant on excessive food processing and cooking for edibility.

Sustainability and the types of research and development

Ultimately, the sun will burn out, the Earth will be forever dark, and life here will have lost its sustaining force. Yet, environmentalists like us say we're after something called sustainability. Indeed, we often tell people that we want to live a sustainable lifestyle.

What we mean by sustainable lifestyle is that we aim to live in a way that does not diminish the possibilities for future life. As some original sustainability advocates said, we don't want "to meet our needs at the expense of the ability of future generations to meet their needs." In fact, we like to state this ethic positively: we aim to have a lifestyle that enhances the possibility of future life and all current life. In this regard, we aim to reduce energy and material dependence and the use of technologies connected to the release of toxins. We want to plant all kinds of trees and plants to help restore soil, air, and water quality. Technologists sometimes overlook the miracle technology of life

³ "For at least four thousand years, the people – or more accurately, the women – of present day Mexico and Guatemala had, every day of their lives, shelled kernels of maize off the cob by hand, washed them in a perforated clay pot, soaked them in a more or less 1 percent lime solution, and then heated (but did not boil) them for twenty to forty minutes. The soaked and softened maize kernels, now called by the Nahuatl term, nixtamal, were then laboriously ground and reground on the "bitter, black stone with three feet called the metate." By all accounts this was backbreaking work; women typically spent five or six hours every morning making masa for tortillas." Pp. 190-91 Bauer, Arnold J. *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

itself!

It is possible that new technologies will be developed that will allow for huge amounts of energy to be generated and consumed without harmful side effects. Perhaps in a hundred or thousand years, humanity will have access to technologies able to reliably provide ten times the current fossil fuel consumption. We don't expect it to happen, especially without major negative side-effects, but we do support employing scientists around the world who work on such miracle technologies. We are, nevertheless, working on the hypothesis that these miracle technologies may not be found. Indeed, we suspect that over the next several dozen and hundred years, the net energy use per person on earth will have to go down. We therefore seek to develop the lifestyle, psychology, and knowledge required to live happily with less energy consumption. We suspect that with a combination of old and new social arrangements and technologies, reasonably sustainable societies can exist in harmony with each other using moderate energy consumption (lower than modern levels). Of course, our research could become irrelevant in the event that certain miracle technologies are developed. We hope we would embrace such possibilities with open arms, although we don't think it is wise for humans to count on them.

Fair share and the privileges of citizenship

We have noted that some countries are net exporters of many physical resources and labor, while other countries are net importers of goods. We aren't sure whether this relationship can continue forever. We have noted, however, that the borders of the developed countries using the most resources tend to be very difficult for immigration. We have reservations about these arrangements, but we also don't claim now to have all the answers.

Considering responsible use of resources, there are two main categories of commodity exchange: labor and natural resources. Each person does a certain amount of productive labor. On average, the amount of labor consumed by persons is the same as the amount produced. Yet, because of the borders being open to goods, yet closed to immigration, people in the developed world consume more labor and physical resources than they produce, whereas people in the less-developed world consume less than they produce. We don't understand how this "imperialist" activity is held together. In some cases, especially hundreds of years ago, it seems to be under threat of military action, but at present it seems that more subtle means to increase and maintain the unequal relationships are at work, partly because of the more involved, critical and informed public. These means include, but are not limited to, advertising, manufacturing needs for new products and services that, for their fulfillment, require more work for the powerful entities, concentration of land and all forms of capital, creation of protectionist trade laws at the national levels, sly public relations, handpicking governmental roles, influencing democratic processes disproportionately, and outright deceit and lying. We don't focus too much on these realities, but realize the valuable lesson that people are subject to push the boundaries of morality and to act in ways that harm others in order to maintain their power and interest.

One thought we have is that in order to live harmoniously in a world that includes these disparities, we need to have a labor expenditure level in line with our own labor production. As far as natural resources, including minerals, energy deposits, and land, we would like to investigate the sustainable levels/methods of use, be aware of average global usage, and strive to use only a fair and reasonable share. Careful research could find these rough levels for every particular resource, but we will likely leave that research to someone else and bunch it all together as energy resources and non-energy resources.

We are interested in engaging in local economic relationships and, to a lesser extent, international trade. We aim to live a lifestyle where we grow the food we eat, build the buildings we live in, and either provide services or make commodities for trade to provide cash for other lifestyle choices. We aim to research and develop social strategies and physical technologies to live at a level that could be common to people around the world, aiming to have our energy, food, land, and money usage around the current world average.

In general we would like to monitor our use of resources, measured by indicators such as land use, fossil fuel use, cash flow, and pollution emissions per resident.

Philosophical Context

Agreed upon assumptions about reality, as well as shared values and dreams, are important to the successful creation and operation of human relations. Agreement among minds makes possible effective group action.

On the other hand, groups are ultimately more effective if they view their assumptions and mental models as open to possible adaptation in the context of continual change in relation to other models. Indeed, action can be brought to more skillful states when conflict arises among minds and assumptions evolve with the above evolving realities.

In between these extremes, we seek to have agreement with each other on some values and definitions, while recognizing that ultimate agreement on every point is not something we need to strive for.

In this spirit, here are some of our thoughts on reality and existence.

Philosophy, Spirituality, Practicality, the Mundane, and Happiness

We enjoy considering questions of philosophy and experimenting with spirituality, individually and in company. We also think it's relevant to the good life. Indeed, our philosophy and spirituality form the foundation of our plans in ways we probably don't even realize. We like to think about that sometimes.

When we say the word of philosophy, we refer to our basic assumptions about reality, addressing issues like the existence of a soul, free will, selfishness, beauty, the nature of physical and mental reality, and the possible existence of a creator or meta-reality beyond the reach of ordinary consciousness. Philosophy is a mental proposition, defined in a mental space, although it includes a perspective on all of reality including the applications of that philosophy in the realm of action. In contrast, we view spirituality as the way our philosophical assumptions are manifested in our everyday existence. Our spiritual position may appear to be integrated in with our philosophy, or it could appear to be in conflict. For instance, a person could hold a philosophical position that "all beings are coming into more and more harmony over time" yet that person might be more and more dissatisfied with the most particular aspects of his life.

Some people view spirituality as separate from physical reality. They describe metaphysical experiences during fasting or meditation or sleep, suggesting that physical reality is part of some more important spiritual or mental realm. Some other people (Ayn Rand being the archetype) insist on a purely physical view of existence, within which mental life exists. A fine statement of the paradox operating here is attributed to Jesus in one of the noncanonical gospels: *If this mental and emotional existence is simply a manifestation on a physical universe, existing in this disgusting body of guts and disease, that's a miracle... but if this physical universe is a manifestation of some spiritual reality, that's a miracle of miracles.*

Although we have not run across a way to prove this one way or the other, we

nevertheless intend to spend most of our time thinking and working in the context of the physical universe, without worrying too much whether we or it exist. We do strive for harmony between our thinking and action, and harmony between these ways of viewing experience, albeit recognizing there will always be some dissonance. Yet we strive for that mostly by living what seems like life on earth, not by investigating or experiencing the alternatives.

It's true that we have each fasted and meditated and prayed and read some religious texts, and we recognize that these experiences broke down some assumptions about reality and allow for greater harmony. But what we value most is effective action and simple pleasure in this physical life in these physical bodies. We acknowledge the value of spiritual quests in order to understand or escape physical reality, and we recognize that we are the beneficiaries of those quests, yet we don't spend much energy engaged in those quests now.

We aim to incarnate our thinking about "what we should do" by doing it and to incarnate our thinking about "how we should relate to each other" by relating that way. We don't claim to be original in this application of our philosophy as our spirituality. We enjoy music, reading, writing, planting seeds, researching plants, harvesting, preparing food, eating, and to some extent, handling money. We aim to create a physical context in which these activities are much of our spiritual life, because they are in harmony and in harmony with nature and we are in harmony with each other.

If friends or future collaborators at Abundance Farm wish to pray or meditate or bow to Mecca or make a pilgrimage to sacred peaks, or teach about how they see reality, that might be fine, and we might even take part. On the other hand, we view those activities as optional and not of a higher value than the other activities of daily life.

Some people view spirituality and philosophy through the eyes of one specific philosophy and language (or a combinations), for instance, Western Liberal Democracy, Catholicism, Humanistic Psychology, Anthroposophy, or Voodoo. Other people have a more eclectic approach, incorporating elements of Christianity, psychology, Buddhism, and physics into their views and experiences of reality. We tend to embrace the eclectic approach. Whatever works, we tend to use it as long as it is still working, whether it is a philosophy, ritual, or a gardening tool.

The Relationship Between Thinking and Doing

Why can't we just live life intuitively, that is, "just live life" and have a good time? What good are thinking, forming models of reality, and using them to evaluate and guide our actions? It seems that many people don't need to think that much, and are satisfied with simply going with the flow in their lives. Perhaps there is a history that explains why some of us humans are so dedicated to thinking through our options and creating paths that feel right and make sense. Perhaps there is a reason why making sense is part of feeling right for us. Perhaps we, too, are simply going with the flow – a flow that includes the presence in us of a dedication to living consciously, living thoughtfully, living sincerely.

All organisms have evolved models of reality to survive, whether conceived in

symbolic language or implicit in neuron behaviors. For instance, bacteria have evolved a model rating the value of nearby particles. When a bacterium senses the presence of a useful particle in its surroundings, this triggers various mechanisms within the bacteria to harvest and make use of those particles. This doesn't mean, however, that their model is 100% accurate. Otherwise bacteria would not (erroneously) identify some viruses as useful and allow them in. Likewise, the human body evolved models of the kinds of molecules useful to its survival. Human specimens that developed an appropriate satisfaction and craving for those useful molecules ultimately had an advantage in survival—with the right amount of “push” to harvest useful molecules, they were more fit to survive. And so we continue to crave and appreciate the sugars, the fats, the minerals, and the proteins. Without any consciously held models of reality, the organism survives and does well. It works.

But the problem of living intuitively, that is, living unconsciously but unhindered by thinking and reflection, is that what worked in the past doesn't always work in the future. For example, in our current era of affluence in America, the abundance of sugars, fats, salt, and proteins and our continued craving has created all kinds of bodily disorders from overeating. This is where conscious models of reality begin to play a role, even for dealing with small scale, biochemical processes like the operation of a cell. As humans have become better and better at creating technology to harvest energy and create technology to employ that energy, we have increased our ability to alter the systems, the realities, in which we exist on Earth. We can no longer rely on intuition to exist healthily in these new realities, or rely on unconscious models to guarantee good times. We must think, reflect, and develop and test mental models.

Thus far, we have mentioned examples concerning the healthy operation of individual organisms and not larger “organisms” that emerge from the interaction among species or groups of the same species, such as ecosystems, human communities, and global economies. Humans try to model the behavior of these uber-organisms as well, using language, metaphors, stories, logic, mathematics, images, etc. in order to guide their behavior towards beneficial results. (Although sometimes it seems we just create models to ensure the mind that the current larger-scale processes are fine the way they are. For example, In Europe during the Middle ages, for example, intellectuals modeled society after the human body, calling it the “body politic.” Peasants were just the arms and legs of the body doing the work for more important functions carried out by the warriors, nobles, and kings, which in turn provided for the security of the arms and legs. Thus, no one bothered to question the privilege of the aristocracy and whether or not they were doing a good job and deserved their role in the hierarchy.)

At other times, people have turned to old stories to describe new and confusing times. Thus, William Blake used biblical concepts to make sense of the American and French Revolutions. Now, more and more, it seems that humans are using these mental models to guide the behavior of large scale processes. During the cold war in America, for example, strategists believed that if one nation fell to communism, then many nations would also fall like dominoes. Hence, we had the “domino effect theory.” As electrical and computer engineering developing, a new model of understanding reality developed based on the micro and macro networks being engineered. It's called systems theory. Some ecologists are using it to evaluate the sustainability of human economies. We believe we can improve upon existing large-scale processes with the help of models. We

can also simulate large-scale processes with mental models and actually test them. In short, we can guide individual action toward the betterment of everything with mental models.

One might caution that minds are inherently unable to perform the task of effective mental modeling. This is in the context of the predicate that no system is capable of understanding its own operation, because understanding would require more units than the number used in the system's current operation. If you add more units to try to understand, you end up changing the nature of the system. Our brains, for example, must have more neurons to understand itself, but, as soon as the first additional neuron is added, the whole nature of the mind changes. Maybe we can't understand ourselves, much less understand the working of human societies and ecosystems in which our minds are embedded.

But whether or not it is possible for our minds to perfectly conceptualize themselves or physical reality, we choose to use assume for ordinary thinking that the minds can at least *approach* understanding of reality.

We recognize that what actually occurs in human action seems to emerge in the context of mental models, but that the mental models themselves do not have the power to cause action. Life and love have their own power. In the seventeenth century, Blaise Pascal wrote, *Le couer a des raisons que la raison ignore*: The heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing about.

So despite the impossibility of perfect mental models, despite the impotence of mental models to control physical reality or emotional reality, and despite our temptation to escape from these challenges, we still chuckle with one another as we plan to buy land that fits in with a set of criteria, and in the meantime, think, write, say and enact, "Meaning is experienced when and where thought and action are integrated."

Uniqueness, Escape, and Conventionality

Either the world isn't perfect, or else the mind just comes up with this idea. In either case, we can either ignore the issues raised by the mind or investigate these concerns and act on our findings. In a broad sense, when confronted with an apparent imperfection of social reality, we find that our action reflects a balance of several approaches: enduring these imperfections, investigating the imperfections, and communicating our findings to a wider audience. We also find ourselves acting in the context of models that are a result of our investigations, by attempting to improve existing institutions and by creating alternatives.

There are classic stereotypes of the extremes of how we could act in these situations: the person willing to endure is the defeated victim or disillusioned activist; the investigator is the university researcher or private sector scientist; the improver is the politician or employee working within the system; the creator is the company founder or revolutionary who forges a new government.

In the 60s and 70s, a wave of productive dropouts, finding fault with several aspects of American society, moved "back to the land" and opted out of mainstream society in favor of collectivist experiments founded to avoid the problems of "evil"

corporations, government, and leadership. A similar wave is occurring now with worldwide protests against the ill effects of globalization, which are supposedly orchestrated by powerful, international finance institutions and multinational corporations for the benefit of the wealthy few. The current ecovillage and permaculture concepts popular among hard-line sustainability advocates are a contemporary expression of this movement of going “back to the land.”

This didn’t start in the 60s and 70s. People who find fault with society go back for centuries, and most likely, will continue to exist for centuries into the future. Indeed, evidence suggests that the Essenes, a type of religious back-to-the-land movement of the first few centuries BC, provided many of the stories that eventually became incorporated into what we now call the gospels of the New Testament.

We certainly don’t believe that we are at the end of time, creating some permanent, perfect solution for the first time in human history. Rather, we believe that we are just at some arbitrary place in time, and that history, since it has tended to repeat itself before the present moment, will tend to repeat itself in the present moment and after the present moment as well.

We have examined multinational corporations and the leadership structures in institutions today and we do find some value in them. However, we also see significant drawbacks as they currently exist. Most middle-class Americans own stock and bonds of corporations, yet have no idea which corporations, because they are owned through mutual funds. In fact, most people don’t even know the difference between a stock and a bond. Modern humans, like historical humans, are a human society with a history of being followers, slowly and painstakingly learning how to participate in leadership. The tendency of corporations to devalue consideration of environmental, social, and personal health, and the tendency of the citizens to be oblivious to their own assets, seem linked. It seems that due to our ignorance we continue to support our assets being used for purposes we would prefer to keep out of our own sight.

Part of how this happens is that stockholders choose their investments to maximize profits. Naturally, the corporate executive officers strive to maximize these profit, thinking that the business must sacrifice some human goals. This often results in externalizing costs of productions to the detriment of societal and environmental health. If it costs 50% more per kilowatt to burn coal with technology that keeps heavy metals and other pollutants from exiting the smokestacks with the smog and then being absorbed into bloodstreams, then, unless people pay the 50% more to burn coal this way, no one will employ the technology. Consequently, public health “pays” the cost of “cheaper” coal-burning technology. And the owners of the stock might even be the ones who are living in the city with low air quality, living with “environmental” asthma.

Those in the 60s/70s wave of productive dropouts sought to work for humanistic values before profits; the prospects of property held in common, consensus-based decisionmaking, and words like “facilitator” (rather than “leader”) inspired people to act. The “paternalistic” leader and the corporation were and distrusted.

One unfortunate result of this distaste for leadership and corporations is that some of the essential tools that could insure the creation and maintenance of the communities were off-limits. As a result, many never got off the ground, some failed quickly, and others survived, though an actual (and sometimes very centralized) leadership structure governed the reality of daily life at an unconscious level, while individuals consciously

discussed egalitarianism and leaderless consensus.

Similar to the problems with “leadership”, issues of asset ownership were often overlooked, because to own and control was thought to wield power over others, and to do that was unkind, evil, etc. Yet, for every commune that was born, there was someone who led and initiated on their own behalf, and there was someone who invested their assets to achieve specific goals held in someone’s mind.

We respect those who study corporations, who make proposals, who try to work from within the mainstream culture. Nevertheless, our project aims to be a home for productive dropouts, albeit while incorporating the importance of leadership, clear asset-management strategies, and formal process.

We plan to invest a substantial portion of our net worth in Abundance Farm and expect it to be organized along lines of a corporation with some private ownership of land possible directly or through long-term leases.

The Dialectic and Successive Approximations

We don’t claim to be expert philosophers, but what we have hear of Hegel’s dialectic sounds useful. We recognize that we are creating something new based on an analysis of what already exists. We are suspicious of the idea of a “general” end of history, although we acknowledge the value of identifying ends of historical periods.

Part of how these models are relevant to us is that we know we can’t produce a complete plan for our project. We can’t guarantee it will work, we can’t guarantee what it will look like, and beyond a certain point, we think it’s not worth trying to delve into the details. For instance, we suspect we’ll have some milk-producing animals, but as we are writing now, we aren’t concerned with whether they will be cows, sheep, or goats.

We are writing this document in front of computer monitors in furnished apartment buildings in the US. In another six or nine months, we plan to be sitting in Panama making decisions about the milk animals, building designs, plants, and budgets. At that time, we’ll be physically and mentally in the new context of the project, and in that context, we’ll be better suited to many of the specific decisions.

Similarly, once the project is running, and we are in the mental and physical context of it, we know that we will have ideas about how our plans should change from what we have written here. What is important to us emotionally may have shifted; what we know may have changed; the world economy may have changed; or perhaps we will simply understand more clearly what our unarticulated underlying goals had been.

We look forward to the development of the project in ways now imaginable and in ways not yet imaginable. We look forward to having a place where we have taken several of the major steps we want to take towards living sustainably and harmoniously, and to seeing the emotional, economic, political, and philosophical landscapes from that point.

With regard to some goals, we expect to experience our progress as steps of successive approximation; with regard to the ongoing clarification of goals, and to progress towards some other goals, we expect to experience our progress as dialectical shifts into new dimensions.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Potential Tensions of Self-Sufficient Sustainability and Educational/Personal Development in Intentional Communities' Missions

Peter Christopher, 2003

I would like to consider the role intentional communities play as research and development labs of lifestyle, psychology, and knowledge we may need for a low-resource future. I have been visiting intentional communities as a hobby for 10 years in several countries around the world. I have visited about three dozen intentional communities, as well as a dozen monasteries and several dozen alternative schools. One thing that is happening at these intentional communities is the development of the skills of how people can get along with each other. It turns out that we have to figure out some complex interpersonal issues when we want to share limited resources. I owe a deep gratitude to the hundreds of years of collective ventures that have courageously taken temporary or permanent shape, including biological families as well as these more extended families. And it is on that heritage that I base my current projects. I believe the society of five centuries from now will likewise owe tremendous debts of gratitude to the work that the current 1% of the population is undertaking, living within their fair share of resources, striving to be ecologically and socially harmonious and sustainable.

What I have been trying to do is investigate my lifestyles and understand how much freedom I have in my everyday choices to make a difference, without political or social change, just as things already are. I found that in choosing where to live, what to eat, what to buy, I have major effects on myself and my world. At the communities I have visited, people are living at a resource expenditure level that is roughly on par with the world average, not the developed world average. I applaud that and seek to emulate it in my \$10,000 annual budget including my traveling expenses. At the communities I have visited, people tend to be physically as healthy and as happy as most of the people I know elsewhere, who live in bigger houses and consume more than their fair share of world resources. These communities I have visited are just a few among thousands worldwide where people are learning how to cooperate, how to live healthily, making the best of modern technology without becoming enslaved to it.

I propose a simple model categorizing the types of production:

Physical labor

Organization of physical labor

Development of practical skills and knowledge

Transfer of practical skills and knowledge

Personal growth of self or others

Note that this is a model of labor only and not of economy in general. It does not take into account consumption of natural resources (consumption without production) or capital/loans (consumption at a different time from production).

There are two potentially problematic developments I have observed in all sorts of cults, including communalists, doctors, professors, healers, priests, and more. Also I

observe the potential for this in myself and observe it the work of other writers like Illich and Tolstoy. These analyses I am presenting from the outside are intended to help understand how a person or community might think it is quite productive but actually be productive only in a trivial sense.

The first of these developments is the total commitment of a group or person to personal growth. This is the case for instance for many Theravadin monks who are governed by strict rules to ensure their devotion to the non-practical. In exchange, the lay populations support those monks by providing the other types of labor. I am not on a campaign to end their lifestyles. I do, however, reserve the right of free speech concerning those groups when I think they are being unrealistic about the importance of their particular brand of personal/spiritual growth. And I simply want to use that free speech to carefully inspect potential problems. Indeed, I have and continue to support many of these perhaps-imperfect gurus. I support them with financial gifts intended to be a proxy for labor, emotional support, and constructive criticism. I value some ministers, psychologists and monks I have met very highly, and I am glad of the ways in which I think their devotion to personal growth increases global happiness and indirectly results in valuable practical developments like reduction in the severity of warfare. It does not, however, seem to be my path now to join a group devoted entirely to personal growth.

The second of these developments is the "experimental" or "educational" facility. One community I visited most recently is an example of this type of development. It is the only "raw food, permaculture" community in Europe and attracts a reasonable number of guests for formal learning in courses and informal "experiencing." It also has low-interest loans from sponsors and possibly some gifts. I gladly paid 10 euros a day there for 3 euros of food, supporting their lifestyle because I do think it is important to be experimental and educational. Yet, when considering that as a place for me to settle, I was concerned that in the name of being experimental and educational, their community was not sustainable economically or ecologically in the way I would like to be. Their economics was dependent on new guests to educate. I would prefer to be psychologically independent, as well as economically independent, of the need to try to show people the value of what I am doing. I prefer to just do it. If they want to listen, fine; if they don't, fine.

I consider these trends potentially problematic both emotionally and practically. They can be emotionally problematic if they reinforce the mindset of needing to change the world and the associated antipathy towards present circumstances. They can be practically problematic because the strategy only works as long as there are less educated people getting resources from the mainstream society to learn the "new" lifestyles. Thus, the new communities are not providing a functional alternative, which I aim to do.

I don't know whether the plan I am considering, to form a community that does not profit economically from teaching, is the only way or a certain way to avoid these pitfalls. But it's a way I'd like to try now. What I would like to actualize is to have a roughly even exchange of production and consumption and a balance of the types of labor. In other words, I do intend to be working in the garden, building my house, repairing my road, and making widgets for sale or exchange. I also intend to do some organization of the labor of myself and others, and likewise accept labor compensation for that. As far as development and transfer of skills and knowledge, I am still not sure whether this will be part of my labor exchange base in my plan. I intend for my "personal

growth" work that benefits myself and others to be just my hobby, rather than conceptualized as something to trade for other people's labor. Ideally, I would like to be able to say the same thing about practical skills and knowledge, and, if I can say that honestly, I will.

If the world happens to learn practical skills or information from me/us, that will be fine. But I don't want to depend on it. If the world happens to experience personal growth from me/us, that will be fine. But I don't want to depend on it, emotionally or practically. I do currently use the world to build models for how to be independent of it, yet in harmony with it, too. Ideally, I would also have these types of independence from anyone in my family or community or school in the same way I want my community to have independence from the world. I will design and create myself in such a way so that I am inwardly balanced and happy, while simultaneously able to act as an external catalyst when the right elements are in my vicinity. But if everyone in my community already knows everything and doesn't want to learn anything from me, that's wonderful! Life itself is the one joy I will plan to depend upon.

Partner Organizations

We imagine that much of our success will be linked to our ability to identify and team with relevant organizations around Central America and the world that share some common goals. These other organizations will provide us with short-term and permanent residents, funding for conservation efforts and the international exchange programs, planting materials/expertise, marketing services for products, and analytical persons from communities or research institutes to engage in collaborative self assessment and external assessment.

AERO / The International Democratic Education Community – Peter is a member of AERO’s advisory board and an associate of AERO’s Director, Jerry Mintz. Through work with AERO, Peter has visited schools in the U.S., England, Thailand, Russia, and India that have connections with the Democratic Education movement. The international exchange program will begin by working primarily with schools that we have come into contact with through AERO.

GORACE, the Local Organic Produce Growers’ Alliance in Chiriqui, Panama, is an example of the kind of local organization we will work with. In our recent trip to Panama, we met the head of this small growers organization and discussed with him their development of a marketing cooperative that coordinates between growers and grocers. To a lesser extent, some GORACE members work together producing composts. He was glad to share what his Growers’ Alliance had achieved and also expressed interest in working with us in the event we located our project in Panama.

Existing Intentional Communities in Central America - We visited and are in contact with a dozen currently existing communities in Costa Rica: Longo Mai, Finca Ipe, Punta Mona, Durika, Cascada Verde, and others - as well as in Panama - Finca Buena Vida. Founders and existing members at these communities expressed eagerness to share what they could and to help us in our project. This includes sharing information on agriculture, land currently for sale at reasonable prices, legal documents and recommended lawyers, and seeds/plants. The networks of communities in Central America may continue to be informal, or they may become more formal with time. Indeed, it is even possible that Abundance Farm will catalyze the development of more formal exchanges and coordination.

The Peace Corps - The Peace Corps has over a hundred volunteers in diverse locations and projects throughout Panama, and there are hundreds of returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) who maintain an interest in Panama’s development. Indeed, we have been pleasantly surprised by the dedication of several RPCVs we’ve contacted. Not only were they interested in sharing about their experience, but they also expressed an interest in continuing to be a part of Panama, possibly by joining our project. We’ve also visited the country headquarters in Panama City. The organization may be an ally in organizing visas for our future residents, while current volunteers certainly can provide us local

contacts in agriculture and business. Notably, the Peace Corps has an ambitious program of growth planned for the next five years; hence, the possibility also exists for more formal engagement of current and future volunteers to be core group residents.

Churches - There is potential harmony between the mission of many churches and our programs. Churches have long been charitable, usually striving for the development of peace, harmony, and world unity. While they have to some extent been “places of last resort,” that is, places that alleviate suffering by treating the symptoms, the charitable arms of churches are questioning this strategy and hoping to act more proactively, to reduce the dependency of those suffering rather than increase it. Our programs are much in line with these developments in charitable giving. We will provide an actual embodiment of the intercultural peace programs many churches believe in, and we think that some funding for the international exchange programs, as well as some of the potential participants, will come from these sources.

Foundations and charitable individuals— We propose three avenues for charitable collaboration. First, many foundations today are still investing the largest portion of their assets in the stock market, receiving some financial return, but at the expense of actually using their assets in a way that satisfies their ethical concerns. So, we provide a way to invest that supports their ethical concerns, while they retain direct connections with their assets. These could be structured either as guaranteed loans to the corporation with fixed returns or through equity ownership. Second, foundations can permanently invest money by purchasing development rights on land for the purpose of conservation and caretaking by the farm. Third, foundations can donate to support the cost of visas and travel for the international exchange program. Community businesses leverage these gifts by covering the guests’ expenses in exchange for their labor. We do not yet have strong relationships with foundations but we are open to building these with time.

Agriculture research stations & nurseries, non-profit and for-profit - We have visited several, including CATIE (in Turrialba, Costa Rica) and ECHO (in Fort Meyers, Florida). Both conduct agricultural research trials and support new variety introductions, provide education, write and sell publications, and sell seeds/plants.

Worldwatch Institute / Global Ecovillage Network / United Nations / Travel Guides / Tour Groups (Costa Rican Adventures) / “SAT Adventure Camp,” (satadventurecamp.com) / Earth University in Costa Rica (can provide source of visitors) / Newspapers - Providing information and publicity

Business Ideas

- Making compost
- Used vegetable oil collection for making biodiesel
- Dairy (goats, cows, or sheep for production of cheese, yogurt, milk)
- Nut and fruit production
- Dried fruit processing
- Oilseed production with multiple kinds of crops, both annual and perennial
- Vegetable production for direct sales, wholesaling, or CSA
- Solar powered popcorn popper manufacturing
- Healthy bus snack making
- Tree nursery (with nitrogen-fixing plant symbiont culturing)
- Seed production
- Border crossing guesthouse retreat
- Restaurant
- Tree pruning
- Website design
- Making cloth and/or clothing
- Making furniture
- Building bicycle trailers
- Political asylum refugee assistants
- Making hammocks
- Installation of appropriate-technology equipment
- Transcribing
- Book indexing
- Consulting
- Ethnic herb and vegetable production
- Making screen for screen porches; installing screen porches
- Plain and spiced vinegars
- Timber production
- Microbial inoculant production (i.e. culturing of mycorrhizae fungi and Rhizobia bacteria for symbiotic purposes with specific plant species)
- Oilseed processing for energy or food consumption
- Natural condoms (i.e. organically grown rubber scented with essential oils)

Open Questions

We expect some of these questions to be answered with time and experience, while others may be eternal questions. Our goal is not to research these questions, but rather to live life. Nevertheless, ideas about these questions will probably be a matter for consideration within life, though not the purpose of the project. We also include some of our current thoughts on these open questions.

- **Will we be satisfied with living a rural, sustainable lifestyle in the tropics?** Perhaps books and music and businesses and locals and guests and each other will not be enough for us. Perhaps we will crave the complexity of cities. Perhaps we will crave the northern winters. Perhaps we will want to be closer to our families. Perhaps we will be drawn to wander in Asia and in Africa. We tend to think that part of satisfaction is living with the right external conditions (which we are trying to create) and part of it is an internal position, recognizing and accepting emotional developments without running from the conditions that seem to trigger them. But will that make sense when we are in the situation? And if we end up using our saved money from the global economy to escape from Abundance Farm for half of every year, what does that say about the emotional and economic sustainability of the project?
- **Will we be able to run businesses that make enough money to cover operating expenses, while working only part-time?** We certainly aim to keep expenses low, and we have the major advantage of not needing to pay for the land in our design. But profits may also be low, because we are talking about living in a country with an average income around \$5000, compared to \$35,000 in the US. And though we have some experience running businesses, we have not yet run profitable ones.
- **How will we balance allocating profits to investors and residents?** This is a question embraced by every business worldwide, and we will be no exception. We can allocate profits to residents by offering bonus payments, overtime wage labor, or reduced work requirements. How will we make these decisions? Overall, we would like to have a return on investment for equity investors that approximates the increase in real estate values during the time of their investment. Perhaps, like public utilities granted monopoly rights, we will come up with some guidelines for how to follow this through. But ultimately, the decision will rest with the shareholders, who will have to sufficiently satisfy the residents in order to keep them happily and productively working.
- **How does giving veto power to one person, or a small group of people affect how others participate in the decision-making?** We expect it will affect different people in different ways. In reality, we think that one person doesn't have exclusive veto power, because everyone else also has the right to stop participating. The people who have the assets may have the legal right to destroy what has been created, but only with mutual agreement serving everyone's interests can anything be created.

Feedback from Hudson Cress

**** Dreaming of LAND****

The visions for property that I've harbored over the years always involve the same characteristics.

A) Access to a mountain summit offering 360 degree views. Ideally, this will become an observatory for marking the solstices and equinoxes. This will become the sacred circle for the community, and the strictest restrictions on behavior apply (which are??). Having a horizon-to-horizon view elevates the human, and emphasizes the broadest possible thinking. There's a reason wizards live in towers.

B) The north slope is ideal for growing construction timber. Douglas fir especially likes it cold and, the relative dimness causes them to reach for the sun, growing taller faster. For the same reasons, a north slope is usually a poor place for inhabitation. But if one slope of the mountain is not possible to own, it would be this one.

C) The south slope should be long, broad, and graceful, and there should be a stream toward the center of the property, draining into a larger river at the bottom of the slope. This stream should be dammed in several places, to provide the maximum retention of water, thus raising the water table for the property, and minimizing the need for irrigation. Also, ponds distribute water runoff and mitigate flooding. (Fish ladders could be provided as necessary). The south slope is ideal for Passive-Solar Design of houses. Mountainous areas usually require internal heating for the ladies, although men such as Peter and I are too stoic to require such niceties and can share a cave near the top of the mountain. East and West slopes are of less value than the south. East is too cold in the winter, west is too hot in the summer.

D) Valleys. The bottom of valleys seem like a good idea, but rarely work out, unless the valley is very wide. Narrow valley flood, washing away carefully cultivated topsoil, or require much civil engineering to stabilize the floodplain; thus damaging the environment. However, that said, A knoll in the middle of a valley, a small hill perhaps several hundred feet or so high surrounded by much higher mountains (often attached to a nearby peak by a saddle) Would be super-groovy. Energetically this is a castle, fortress walls on three side, and the valley should run north to south. You loose quite a bit of early morning and late evening sun, but such is life. Very Picturesque.

E) the property, in the best of all possible worlds, abuts a National Park. National Parks are protected from all commercial use, unlike National Forests. So In the case of the southern Appalachians, Land adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park would be groovy. Alternately, between the Blue Ridge Parkway and Pisgah National Forest.

Both these sites place one conveniently located to Asheville. However, I have no interest in living in North Carolina ever again. Lately, After living on the rainy Pacific for so long, I'm beginning to crave the Sun, and Land next to Rocky Mountain National park would be nice. This puts the community in close proximity to Boulder, and some of the best snowboarding in the world. With ample solar potential for space heating and Photovoltaic, and really great for wind and water. Also, steep drops along natural streams makes Micro-hydro very viable. Northern California has a number of possibilities as well, offering some fine winemaking potential, in the first year by simply buying grapes. After five or so, growing our own to make organic wine (a high-ticket commodity). The Eastern Slope of the Cascades, in the vicinity of Bend, Oregon; near Three Sisters National Park, or just the other side of the mountains from Seattle likewise has far more sun, to the extent of being arid. Nevertheless, with bountiful snowmelt, there's rarely cause for worry about drought. In fact, with proper retention ponds, and 'warm'houses, agriculture can be continued practically year round. But the most critical thing is maximizing space to roam and minimizing the need to protect views from future development. Also, from a paranoid-defensive perspective, should the world degenerate into anarchy, being between a river and a national park, with mountains to the north, and a river to the south and steep valleys to the east and west is really attractive to me when I think VERY VERY long term; say 500 years. Natural defenses are good sense when you consider America's foreign policy, and the future domestic policy it implies.

F) I see no reason to build a community outside America, with the possible exceptions of New Zealand (really cheap, great investment along a 100 timeline, economy will improve dramatically as population increases, And it is still relatively undeveloped) and British Columbia in Canada (someone mentioned frontiers. They are alive and well in the Canadian Rockies. Although it is a bit smaller than 200,000, Nelson, B.C. is one of the most special places I've ever been in my life. Crystals abound in every river bed, the slopes of mountains are huge boulders covered in moss; Excellent for micro-logging, one tree being adequate to build one cabin; All the stone for construction you can haul, Excellent precipitation, snow melt mountain streams. Cleanest water imaginable, and, well, phenomenal snowboarding and the world's best herb PLUS steady decriminalization; Read: 'eco'tourism.) As for the rest of the world, All I have to say is God Bless America. It really is the land of unbridled opportunity by comparison. This discussion is nearly inconceivable among the Japanese. As for Europe. The Alps could work, but we'd need to all learn German, Italian or French as the case may be. The Pyranese are really nice, but again, learning Spanish. And when you get right down to it, The west coast is far more progressive and less entrenched in tradition than Europe, and therefore that much more malleable for a Novus Ordo Seclorum. Australia would also be okay, but, yah, no Snowboarding; but all the kangaroos you can eat, minimizing need for agriculture ;-)

G) One word: Hotspring!

A Note About Economics and Capitalism

After many years of considering alternate economies, I do not dismiss them, I just have come to accept that Capitalism is the most effective way of interacting with capitalism. Personally, I'm registered to vote as a Communist. But that's very idealistic. Fundamentally I don't see any problem intrinsic in Capitalism. Its not inherently exploitative; defining the economic structure of a commune within Standard Accepted Accounting Practices is just realistic. Calling it a Condominium is not far from exploitative. Instead it gives each and every person a legally defensible property right. I guess my problem with the term "commune" is that its fine if you walk in with nothing and walk out with nothing. But real people (unlike myself) like to acquire property, and save for retirement. Therefore, buying and selling of property rights encourages a more sober commitment of capital for investment in the future of the project. Likewise with any micro-industrial project. It would be nice if everyone would work for free and all profits immediately reinvested in infrastructure. But that economic model is termed indentured servitude/slavery. I like to travel. If I can't save about 5 grand a year for travel, then I'm wasting my time. That's my bottom line. A commune system doesn't give me any way of escaping. Cash in hand is requisite if I want to buy a new computer, or a new Saxophone, or a new Widget. I'm anti-materialism in general. I don't care about owning the roof over my head, personally. But I do love my laptop and Camera, etc.

I'm missing your point I can tell. Let me bring it back. What is GOOD about capitalism is that its impersonal. It encourages individual effort like no other system in the history of mankind. What is bad, is that its godless and evil. But putting that aside for a minute, It is the dominant trend in the Political and Legal landscape, and clearly defining means of ownership within a commune will encourage personal initiative better than something flakey and idealistic. Communism in Russia fell because there was no money in it. Likewise, most communes [vast generalization] fail because it encourages hanging out more than working hard. I am interested in developing a sustainable economic system that surpasses the existing model by eating it away from its inside. This means perfecting the interface of a moneyless commune and a capitalist world.

General Suggestions for the Project

- 1) Re-canonize yourself as a "facilitator" instead of a leader. You are deriving an unhealthy level of ego-gratification from perceiving yourself in this way. By a simple process of NLP you will necessarily become less autocratic, less the center of attention, and actually *able* to lead.
- 2) Concentrate on evolving an economic model where your fortunes are not tied to the community's. My recommendation is the one I last established prior to abandoning my dreams. Instead of being a landlord, I bankrole the investment along the lines of a condominium. In a condo, people own the right to space within a building, but do not actually own

the walls or infrastructure. Rather, the land-trust and management or holding company, if you will, as a corporate entity holds the lease to the land and all improvements therein. Therefore, as people "buy in" to the community, they are effectively "buying you out." At the end of the day you can even extract a healthy profit with which to bankroll a NEW community, hopefully affiliated with the first, in a different climate, or with a different agenda. I know it sounds evil, but banks will be much more likely to drop a SMALL BUSINESS loan of around five million dollars (with a down payment of 10% equaling approximately what I imagine you are foreseeing investing) upon a corporate enterprise rather than a hippie commune, or worse, one man's megalomaniac vision.

3) With the additional capital up front, you can roll out a plan for a housing community, a school, and micro-industry, sustainable energy infrastructure, all your sewage and waste treatment, and even buy all those exotic botanicals that we'll inevitably want for the permaculture gardens. Fear not, Hippie Laborers will be in ample supply if you drop word on the Rainbow circuit, and they work for food and shelter, and a little herb.

4) Now, as chairman of a board of directors and primary shareholder, you will have all the cards up front. However, all those buying in to the community (distinct from those living and working there, perhaps) will have the opportunity to usurp your authority by buying your ass out, and leaving you ahead, in the end. The reason capitalism works is because it works.

5) A school, a Land-Trust Eco-Community Development scheme, and a couple Micro-Industry projects (pottery's a no-brainer (which is why I luv it) collectively can pay the mortgage on the property. It becomes a business, and has to be accountable as such. Your days in the sun are numbered from the beginning, thus smoothing over inevitable interpersonal conflicts. Which brings me to the most important point.

6) At this stage in the game, you need partners. You need people who have an equal stake and an equal share. You cannot do anything grand alone. You can barely buy a big new house (which in most parts of the States comes out around half a million these days) by yourself, much less start a community. You need partners equal to yourself, and this can only occur by consensus decision making. This can only work with yourself as a facilitator. Since you have the cash, you need that to NOT be a bargaining chip, but rather, as an investment, you should be asking, "When will I see it again." I think 20 years, amortized by 5% per year, to grow it to match inflation, leaving you a near-zero profit margin. Clearly, consensus, giving everyone veto power over all decisions takes fucking forever, but its the only way to assure equality, and avoid leader/follower syndrome.

But that's the model I left the game with. Now I doubt the ability of anything new under the sun to evolve in a world where self-interest rules the day. The last true altruist died on a cross thousands of years ago, and every altruist since has been bearing one in homage.