

INTERVIEW

*Finding the Spiritual Element in Agriculture at Genesis Farm*Reconnecting
with the Earth*Sister Miriam MacGillis*

Miriam MacGillis is a member of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey. She lives and works at Genesis Farm, which she co-founded in 1980 with the sponsorship of her congregation. Genesis Farm is an ecological learning center and community garden, farmed biodynamically, in tune with the rhythms of the world. The farm provides a setting for people to come and consider the pressing ethical and ecological questions of our time. Sister Miriam sees the world standing at a dangerous crossroads, with mankind's toxic ways critically hampering our own path toward life, health and healing. She lectures widely on the issues she discusses in this interview with Acres U.S.A.



ACRES U.S.A. Let's begin with Genesis Farm. How did it come to be?

MACGILLIS. Genesis Farm came to the Dominican sisters in the will of Rupert and Mary von Beckman, a wealthy German baron and his wife. We have tried to create an ecological center that is a safe place for people to come and ask some of the deeper questions about the meaning of our culture — where we are going, our ecological impact, what is happening to people and basic freedoms, the loss of farms, and the loss of farmers. We have moved toward creating an academic program, through affiliation with several universities, and can now offer 15 graduate credits in what we call Earth Literacy. In addition, we try to be a presence in the local community through a community supported garden (or CSA) which has about 200 shareholders and that has been in operation about 13 years now.

ACRES U.S.A. Shareholders pay a certain amount of money each year?

MACGILLIS. Yes. The amount is based on our actual operating cost, which includes every single item neces-

"They came up with their own solution that, since this was their garden and food system, why not invest in it instead of taking out a mortgage or a loan and investing in a bank or an economic system that is going to go elsewhere."

sary to raise the food, including wages and benefits for the farmers, which we are trying to raise incrementally to make their livelihood sustainable. A budget is created by the gardeners and a core group of committed shareholders, and that is divided equally among the shareholders.

ACRES U.S.A. How long is the garden's season?

MACGILLIS. The garden is open 50 weeks a year. In 1992, the shareholders and gardeners decided to create a root cellar because they wanted to be able to have an extended season. They also wanted to plant an orchard, and there was no place to store things. They came up with the idea of creating a root cellar and a larger structure over that as their garden shed. The most amazing thing happened with that. One of the shareholders was a contractor and he said, "If you're willing to help, I'll organize a four-day barn raising. Bring food and tools and I'll get everybody into teams. We'll have this well-designed structure." Basically, that is what happened. The cost for materials, \$38,000, was generated by the shareholders after a lot of deliberation. They came up with their own solution that, since this was their garden and food system, why not invest in it instead of taking out a mortgage or a loan and investing in a bank or an economic system that is going to go elsewhere. They raised that money in a very short period of time by giving no-interest or very low interest long-term loans. The building went up and it is now possible to have a 50-week pickup.

ACRES U.S.A. How did you decide to have a community garden?

MACGILLIS. Our garden has been in operation about 13 years, and we came in at the very beginning of the movement in this country. In fact, I think there were only six other CSAs in the states when we heard about it. Heinz Thomet, a biodynamic farmer from Switzer-

land, had joined us in 1986, and he put in the first biodynamic garden. At the end of that season he was trying to sell that food from a little stand up on the road. It became clear that in this present market system it is impossible to get a true value for the food that you grow, because you will always be underpriced by the supermarket in the larger system. At the end of that season we saw the first articles on community supported agriculture and a film called *It's About More Than Just Vegetables*, and we got excited. We put out a flyer to people who were affiliated with the farm. We put out the core idea and invited people to have a meeting. The house was packed with people who were interested, and that very day we signed up 70 families.

ACRES U.S.A. Did the families help with the gardening?

MACGILLIS. No, they joined as shareholders. They formed a core group immediately. It took a couple of years to really be up and running. But it has continued to evolve since the first year.

ACRES U.S.A. You gardened biodynamically from the beginning; how did you decide that?

MACGILLIS. I heard about biodynamic agriculture in the 1970s when I was involved in the issues of world hunger. It was a new concept to me then. I was so touched by the beauty and spiritual dimension of it. When Genesis Farm got started, I kept hoping we would find a way to do biodynamic agriculture here. I never dreamed that we would be lucky enough to have somebody walk down the drive and be willing to do it — and a skilled farmer at that. That's what happened.

"When Genesis Farm got started, I kept hoping we would find a way to do biodynamic agriculture here. I never dreamed that we would be lucky enough to have somebody walk down the drive and be willing to do it — and a skilled farmer at that."

ACRES U.S.A. Why were you hoping so much for biodynamics?

MACGILLIS. Biodynamics reinforces and complements my own perception of the Earth as a living organism with a deep spiritual dimension. The study and exploration of what may be called the new science or new cosmology, which has been articulated clearly for me through the works of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, demonstrates that from the very beginning Earth has had a deep bio-spiritual dimension that has been evolving along with its physical dimension. I first heard Thomas Berry in 1977, and that experience had a profound effect on my life and on the beginnings of Genesis Farm. What I knew about biodynamics was that

INTERVIEW

it was an approach to plants, soils, microbes and the land as a living organism that was as spiritual as it was physical. It was an instinctual feeling that it was an appropriate and very beautiful way to farm.

"What I knew about biodynamics was that it was an approach to plants, soils, microbes and the land as a living organism that was as spiritual as it was physical. It was an instinctual feeling that it was an appropriate and very beautiful way to farm."

ACRES U.S.A. People sometimes think biodynamic farming is akin to witchcraft. Does it ever feel in conflict with your background to be practicing this alchemy on the land?

MACGILLIS. I haven't found any conflict at all. When I read Rudolf Steiner's cosmology and some of his ideas about the origin of the world, I get into territory that I don't understand. But in terms of the application of his understandings of a spiritually-based universe, Earth and human, they are very much in synch with the way I think the contemporary scientific story of the universe actually works. For both Steiner and people who might adhere to the new cosmology, there is no contradiction between a divine creator or divine being. It isn't the nature of science to explore that question; science can only explore the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world, as we are discovering it, has a deep, inner, mysterious, spiritual dimension. I think that's what is so exciting for me as a Christian, because it breaks apart, or helps resolve, the dualities that have been so much a part of the Western world's view of reality, which sees only humans as having a spiritual dimension. Everything that isn't human — animals, plants, fish, birds, water — was traditionally believed to be simply a physical material reality. That just doesn't hold anymore and it is very liberating to realize that.

"The phenomenal world, as we are discovering it, has a deep, inner, mysterious, spiritual dimension. I think that's what is so exciting for me as a Christian, because it breaks apart, or helps resolve, the dualities that have been so much a part of the Western world's view of reality, which sees only humans as having a spiritual dimension."

ACRES U.S.A. Is that what is meant by the new cosmology, what you just described?

MACGILLIS. Yes. As a human species, we have recently acquired and created these instruments that have expanded our senses. You create the Hubble telescope, put it on a spacecraft and send it out into the far reaches of our galaxy. It expands the human eye. What is given back comes to the eye, which registers and interprets the image. We are seeing what no human beings have ever seen, not only in the outer world, but at the subatomic level. No human eye has ever gone inside the

atom. These instruments are giving us evidence that the atom is really a casing, a vessel, that contains another universe inside of it. The spaces and the activity in there are immensely revealing of a depth of mystery that we've never been able to look at before. When we think about the new cosmology, it is this ability to move back into time and space and recount, in a kind of story form, how the universe actually came to be some 12 to 15 billion years ago. We have new ideas about the sequence of changes it has gone through to become more complex — from the initial fireball or elementary particles, to the shaping of stars and galaxies. We understand the lifetime of a star and how certain stars, when they've used up their energy, go through another phase change called a supernova, that brings forth new atomic elements and scatters them into space. That is how our solar system came to be. All of the chemicals that we talk about as being elements in the Earth were shaped inside a supernova, which is itself connected back to the original fireball. It is a sequence of events, and you can't skip any of them. We never knew that. We thought the universe was ready-made, all finished and furnished and we were put into it. It was impossible to know it earlier. That's what we mean by the new cosmology. The most important part is that if the Earth is alive and the human is the Earth at a more complex form, then Earth-human-universe is one reality. It's a developmental process. The human, you could say, is the universe 15 billion years later, thinking about itself.

ACRES U.S.A. Those are very large ideas to consider.

MACGILLIS. They sure are, in every possible way. There is no way we will ever understand this or exhaust the infinite dimensions of it. It's amazing.

ACRES U.S.A. Let's return to the farm. There are 200 subscribers, do they have duties?

MACGILLIS. Our present model has four full-time gardeners — two men and two women. This year we are hoping for two interns. Basically, the actual physical work of growing and harvesting the food is done by them. There is a distribution of food to the shareholders two days a week. On those days, volunteers may come in and help with the harvesting, bagging, sorting or whatever, because it is always done fresh. But if not, it falls on the gardeners and anyone else here to do that work. There are usually volunteer greeters in the distribution shed on pick-up day to answer questions and share menus, especially to orient new people. There is a playground, a library and resource center, and people can take walks in the woods or have picnics; it is often a social time for shareholders. There is a very lovely community-based spirit that has been generating over these years.

ACRES U.S.A. You don't raise animals on the farm?

MACGILLIS. No, we don't have animals. It is strictly vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers. We experimented about three years ago with one cow, a lovely little Jersey. But the gardener who was interested in being a herdsman, he and his wife just had a baby, and it was just too demanding. We were thinking of having a community-supported dairy, where a number of shareholders would buy a share in the cow and then Matt would take care of the cow and milk her. It lasted for a season and we just loved it, but it doesn't seem to be the right time for that now.

ACRES U.S.A. Tell us a little about the learning center and the programs that you run.

MACGILLIS. The learning center predates the garden. It was about creating a place for people to come and ask questions, and it gradually became a learning center. We began to gather resources and pull together a really fine library. We ran short courses, weekend seminars and day-long programs in natural foods cooking, simplifying lifestyles, and various related issues. But always it was the exploration of the new cosmology that was foundational to all the rest. In 1990, we acquired another house on the land. That made it possible for us to run some residential programs. From 1990 to 1993, we did two, six-week programs a year. Students were welcome to come in and study the new story as well as a kind of bioregional context for rethinking economics,

housing, agriculture and all of our human activities. Then a group of companions in higher education, with whom I had been meeting for several years, encouraged me to try to get an academic status for it, and I did.

ACRES U.S.A. Is the course the same whether you come here for college credit or not?

MACGILLIS. Yes, the course is the same. You have to write papers and do the documentation for college credit. It is actually one course of study called "Exploring the Sacred Universe," and it is an immersion experience. We have been experimenting with different time frames of two and three weeks. You need time to process a lot of it because it is not just about the head, it is the heart and lots of time spent in the natural world. The program runs three times a year. When we do it in the fall, it is followed by 10 more weeks, and that is what we call our 12-week residential program, for which a student can get 15 graduate credits.

ACRES U.S.A. A lot of times when we talk about organic or sustainable agriculture, we're sort of told it's fine on a small scale but it will never work in the "real world" of feeding people. What is your answer to that?

MACGILLIS. There is more ideology being practiced in the present system that says that less than 2 percent of the world's people can grow food for all the others. That is the belief that chemicals and technology are an appropriate way to feed the world. Basically, it is extracting from the Earth itself the fundamentals out of which the Earth grows the food. It is a practice that cannot be sustained, no matter what you do. To return to sustainable practices like organic or biodynamic farming is really the only viable way. In order for that to happen, many more people are going to have to come back to the land and engage in that as a way of life that enables the Earth as well as the farmer to prosper, because, ultimately, if the soils, water and air are exploited and extracted, there will be no food for anybody. It is hard to be sustainable on a large scale. I think that there are experiments where it is happening on farms up to 1,000 acres, but I don't think it is sustainable in the long run. It's obvious that there has to be a major shift in the way people think about farming. In the present culture, farming is so devalued and considered a profession with so little dignity or understanding that it is no wonder young people don't want to go into it. But I think with the new understandings about the nature of reality, the nature of the universe and soils, and our understanding that Earth is alive, farming can be rethought of as one of the most mystical, fulfilling and beautiful vocations anyone could respond to. It is really all in your perspective. Major work has to happen in the shifting of our attitudes, but it has to happen anyway.

"It's obvious that there has to be a major shift in the way people think about farming. In the present culture, farming is so devalued and considered a profession with so little dignity or understanding that it is no wonder young people don't want to go into it."

ACRES U.S.A. Is that part of the work that you see Genesis Farm accomplishing through your CSA and the Earth Literacy program?

MACGILLIS. That is what we aspire to. But we realize that many people, organizations, centers, farmers, and associations of farmers are trying to shift attitudes all across the planet. The farmers have always known this in a real sense. It is just that in the more urban as-

see next page

INTERVIEW

from page 31

pect of our culture, as we are further removed from the soil and the natural world, there is this perception we can be liberated from the conditions in which life has held us and that working with the soil is sort of an imprisonment. But that is only a perception. If you believe it, you get what you believe.

ACRES U.S.A. There is an activist side to all of this for you. What do you see as the connections between ethics and activism in relation to farming and food?

MACGILLIS. The story of the universe and the story of the living Earth, and our embeddedness in it, helps us to understand basic principles and dynamics that have guided the universe, Earth and the whole natural world from the beginning until now. It is clear that our industrial model is violating these basic principles and causing unbelievable disruption to life. To say that the human species has to correct itself is almost an understatement, but it is so clear we are the problem. I don't believe it is because we are evil, but because we have a belief system that is just not in synch with the way things really are. We can self-correct, but only with understanding and freedom. Education is more vital now than it has ever been, because the stakes are so high. Any study we do here, or any engagement with these ideas, leads to the inevitable need to transform our culture, our belief systems, and our behavior, because our attachment to the current model is so deep that we have to reinvent most of our cultural ideas and our institutions. Thomas Berry keeps saying we are the only species that invents itself. In other words, our DNA has shaped our makeup as it has shaped the makeup of the maple tree, the corn, or the chimpanzee, but the human species has been mandated by the universe to move to another dimension of capacity, which is self-reflective awareness. We don't just create our culture out of a determined DNA coding, we are engaged in creating that. The kind of cultural beliefs we have had for the last several thousand years were based on the belief that we were separate from everything else. We are discovering that we are not, so we have to reinvent how to do economics, agriculture, education and all of our activities.

"It is clear that our industrial model is violating these basic principles and causing unbelievable disruption to life. To say that the human species has to correct itself is almost an understatement, but it is so clear we are the problem."

ACRES U.S.A. You belong to an organization called Food and Water. What do they do?

MACGILLIS. Food and Water Inc. has been a very successful grassroots advocacy group in defense of the planet's food and water supply. It was started by a New Jersey physician, Dr. Walter Bernstein, who was a very good friend of Genesis Farm, a founding member of our board, and a dear friend. Food and Water was created as a response to an effort on the part of the Department of Energy to come into New Jersey's Appalachian ridge and to mine it for uranium. Uranium mining was slated to happen here in this densely populated part of our continent. Wally almost singlehandedly organized people all around the state to prevent that from happening. Around the same time, it became known that the Department of Energy, with the Department of Agriculture, was promoting the irradiation of the nation's food supply. In other words, the cost of containing radioactive waste at both the civilian and military bases was growing exponentially. Waste was a major problem. The solution to that problem was to sell off the radioactive waste. Private industry would

take the radioactive waste — and what was proposed at the time was about 200 irradiation plants across the United States — and then as all the food came out of the farms of the United States, it would go to a local center where it would be blasted with radioactive isotopes.

"Private industry would take the radioactive waste — and what was proposed at the time was about 200 irradiation plants across the United States — and then as all the food came out of the farms of the United States, it would go to a local center where it would be blasted with radioactive isotopes."

ACRES U.S.A. It mirrors the practice begun after the second World War, which brought us this surplus in chemicals that we decided to slather on our farmland, and now atomic waste has found another agricultural use.

MACGILLIS. It is indicative of how totally disconnected we are from Earth that we would take the most poisonous substance that we know of and pass our food in front of it. It is pretty scary and it is rearing its ugly head again. Our government is pro food irradiation in order to deal with the outbreaks of bacteria and viruses and the *E. coli* in our nation's meat. We are not addressing the basic issues of containment food lots, the use of antibiotics and hormones, the filthy, disgusting conditions in the slaughter houses, and the lack of regulation. Rather than dealing with the problem, we want to cover it up on another level with something that is even worse than the first. Wally Bernstein said it is naive to think that citizens are going to stop something like this by lobbying legislatures. Look at every one of the mainline environmental groups in this country; they raise millions every year to lobby Congress on behalf of the natural world, and the state of things is worse today than it was 20 years ago. Why do we keep making the same mistake? His strategy was, don't think you are going to stop food irradiation by going to Congress. Congress is already in the hands of the corporations. The only way to stop it is if you go directly to the corporations as consumers and say, "If you irradiate your hamburgers, we will not eat them." You get thousands and thousands of irate people going to Tyson's chicken to say, "We love your chicken; you irradiate it and we'll never buy from you again." That is what has stopped food irradiation so successfully. It is amazing how that strategy works, and it's the basic approach of Food and Water — going right to the producer. They would get all of the trade magazines so they knew everything that was going to happen and were there ahead of the corporations.

ACRES U.S.A. They functioned similarly to a watchdog group.

"Congress is already in the hands of the corporations. The only way to stop it is if you go directly to the corporations as consumers and say, 'If you irradiate your hamburgers, we will not eat them.'"

MACGILLIS. It was watchdog but very much activist. Wally Bernstein died three years ago, and Food and Water has taken a major shift. It is not doing that kind of constant activism any longer. Its journal has turned to more of an analysis of the issues. While they are certainly promoting activism, they feel that without deeper philosophical understandings and without the alternatives in place, the industry is too powerful at this point for any group to stop it. Now it is more getting to the heart of the matter and trying to generate thinking about it.

ACRES U.S.A. You are also involved in Earth Save?

MACGILLIS. I'm on the advisory board of Earth Save, which is a foundation that was created by John Robbins of Baskin Robbins ice cream fortune. He is the author of *Diet for a New America*. Earth Save is pro-active in promoting a plant-based diet for the American people and demonstrating that the planet cannot sustain an animal-based diet either in terms of a planet of six billion human beings having equal access to food, or in terms of the health of people, given the present state of animal food production and factory farms. The amount of land and water it takes economically can't be sustained, and the bottom line is that ecologically it can't be sustained. We try to help people understand that a plant-based diet is healthy and delicious. It is not a sacrifice, it's a win-win situation.

ACRES U.S.A. When we spoke earlier, you mentioned the genetically-engineered salmon that escaped their pens and are now free with the wild salmon.

MACGILLIS. It's a poignant example of what is happening as corporations have been given permission to experiment with genetically altered organisms and just put them out there into the global commons. The traits that are going out there are forever. The rest of the creatures can't distinguish between a genetically altered or true creature. They simply are becoming subjected to the most intrusive human interference, marring the integrity of the organism. The salmon story is powerful because the salmon, in so many cultures, is such a spiritual symbol. It reveals in its life pattern deep teachings of the nature of what it is to live in a world where we give ourselves over to the common good and that there is a certain ethic or fulfillment in that. The question is, What happens to the salmon when they no longer know how to go upstream and return to their place and spawn?

"It's a poignant example of what is happening as corporations have been given permission to experiment with genetically altered organisms and just put them out there into the global commons. The traits that are going out there are forever."

ACRES U.S.A. Your thinking about this is not just about fish and animals, but also the seeds that we are altering now over at Monsanto and places like that. What do you say to people who make the argument that these genetically modified materials are going to save the world from disease, that this is the way we will feed our starving people?

MACGILLIS. The first response I have is that we can feed the starving people right now, and we have been able to do it for as long as I can remember. I became involved in world hunger issues in the early 1970s, and we could feed the world then. It isn't a question of quantity of food; it is a question of political will to do a different distribution and a different approach to the nature of food and to ask the question, Does everyone have a right to food? Is food simply a commodity, and if you don't have money you don't

INTERVIEW

have the right? It is a deep philosophical, ethical question, and it has something to do with your orientation to the world, to existence. For anyone to argue that genetic modification is the answer to hunger is an outright lie that flies in the face of all the evidence of the last decades. I don't believe that any more than I believe the sky is green. Secondly, that's a smoke-screen to silence those who would be raising deeper issues. Public relations firms have been hired since Monsanto suffered such a blow with the European rejection of biogenetically engineered foods. They brought out the big guns and go after anyone who is trying to teach the public that this is not healthy. The best way to discredit anyone is to say that they don't want to feed the world or they don't want to cure sick children in Africa. Well, we could be curing sick children in Africa with a quinine tablet or an iodine tablet; that's all people have ever needed for many of the diseases that kill people. It's a lie, and someone needs to say, "You are lying." We need to ask these corporations, "Who gave you the authority to alter life? Who gave you permission? Who gave you the global commons of air, soil, water and all the incredible diversity of life and the integrity of all the living species?" Just because a company changes something one little iota, they now claim to own it and can patent it and claim intellectual property rights. It is a big lie. It is just the most outrageously arrogant thing. I'm not saying that people who work in those companies are arrogant, many of them believe in what they are doing.

"It isn't a question of quantity of food; it is a question of political will to do a different distribution and a different approach to the nature of food and to ask the question, Does everyone have a right to food? Is food simply a commodity, and if you don't have money you don't have the right?"

ACRES U.S.A. How do you think we can better approach the situation?

MACGILLIS. What I find lacking is a cosmological context. When I read the arguments about the appropriateness of doing genetic engineering from an ethical point of view, it always has the human as center. In other words, will we be just, will we give equitable payment, will we compensate other humans for what we are doing? There is no foundational context, which from my perspective has to be a cosmological one. How can you understand the morality of changing DNA without understanding how DNA came to be? And if you only begin with whether humans own it or don't own it, the argument is so inadequate it just limps. Biogenetic engineering is a threshold that, once crossed over, it will not be possible to come

"We need to ask these corporations, 'Who gave you the authority to alter life? Who gave you permission? Who gave you the global commons of air, soil, water and all the incredible diversity of life and the integrity of all the living species?'"

"How can you understand the morality of changing DNA without understanding how DNA came to be? And if you only begin with whether humans own it or don't own it, the argument is so inadequate it just limps."

back. We have no answers. There is a lawsuit to go back through the process by which the Department of Agriculture gave approvals for the field testing of millions of acres of genetically altered plants. We are realizing the terrible science that was actually done by Monsanto and Novartis, and their own scientists were blowing the whistle. Now we are learning about the complicity between the corporations, the Department of Agriculture, the EPA and the Food and Drug Administration, and realizing this was all orchestrated. Look at how much altered material is out there already and how much is in the pollen. It's another indication of how rapidly science technology, driven by economic self-interest, has transcended the control of local and regional people, ethicists, or even nation-state governments. That is scary in the face of the future of democracy, and it is even more scary in the face of the future of life.

ACRES U.S.A. Can you imagine people coming back to farming in large enough numbers that farming communities like Genesis Farm exist on a large scale, where people once again go to their local farm and buy goods?

MACGILLIS. I can envision it because there are models that already exist. Inner-city Philadelphia has extraordinary neighborhood community gardens that are absolutely, outrageously gorgeous and productive and community-building. You can go to California, where they have mandated that every single elementary school make gardening a component of the curriculum, and every school will have a garden. Alice Waters, who is one of the most renowned chefs in the world, initiated a community garden for children. Katherine Sneed in California works with inmates and

"Inner-city Philadelphia has extraordinary neighborhood community gardens that are absolutely, outrageously gorgeous and productive and community-building. You can go to California, where they have mandated that every single elementary school make gardening a component of the curriculum, and every school will have a garden."

provides gardening as therapy and a profession for people who love it so much that they practically go back to prison so they won't get kicked out of the program. There are individuals doing this work, and there are organic farms and CSAs. There is a growing awareness among the American people about organic foods, an increase in the market demand for organic foods, and a rise in the economic incentives to farm organically. If you look at all these things, aren't they saying something about our instinctive knowing and people's desire for pure, good food? All of that is more powerful than the drift we have been in, because we have been asleep. We've been working so hard that we

have bought the American dream that says if it is efficient, and you can microwave it, and it is prepackaged and prewashed, then it is good. I think that has run its course and people are waking up. There is research out now suggesting that suburbia is the ideal scale in which local food supply can be initiated, because it is a wonderful scale for gardens.

There is a growing awareness among the American people about organic foods, an increase in the market demand for organic foods, and a rise in the economic incentives to farm organically. If you look at all these things, aren't they saying something about our instinctive knowing and people's desire for pure, good food?

"There is research out now suggesting that suburbia is the ideal scale in which local food supply can be initiated, because it is a wonderful scale for gardens."

ACRES U.S.A. What is the role of the farmer in all of this?

MACGILLIS. The farmer has a priestly role. Rudolf Steiner realized that the Earth was growing the food, not the farmer. He understood the forces by which this is happening — the transubstantiation of soils, water, nutrients, air and sunlight is an astounding, miraculous thing. The farmer was the person who stood in the midst of that mystery and mediated it from observation of how it happened rather than imposing his will on the soil or the seeds. All of that happened before humans ever evolved. We didn't create soil, seeds, or genetics; we just named them. I think Steiner has always said

"To put a seed in the ground is to participate in what already is. It is far beyond us even to comprehend, let alone control."

that. It is an awesome mystery, how stardust becomes a planet, and that happens without any human activity at all. Humans have just arrived in terms of evolutionary time. It was all given to us; it was an endowment. To begin to open your eyes, ears, heart and your understanding to the mystery of this leads you into the depth of recognition that this is beyond us. It is so awesome. Thomas Berry says that to plant a seed is to activate the deepest mysteries of the universe, and I think that is what we are talking about. To put a seed in the ground is to participate in what already is. It is far beyond us even to comprehend, let alone control. If there is a contemplative approach to agriculture and an entry into the mystical aspects of that, then perhaps the human who enters it will be able to elevate the work of cultivating food for others — the sense would be that the one who grows food is dispensing grace. Because we eat not only earth, air, fire and water when we eat the tomato, we are eating its inner mystery as well, which is spirit. That, for me, is the basis for understanding what Eucharist would be in my Christian tradition and in other traditions would be understood with different metaphors. You are eating mystery.

Anyone interested in the CSA or Earth Literacy programs at Genesis Farm should write to: Genesis Farm, 41A Silver Lake Rd., Blairstown, New Jersey 07825, or call (908) 362-6735.