

**Openings:** It has been over thirty years since Joni Mitchell sang "Hey farmer farmer Put away that DDT now, give me spots on my apples, but leave me the birds and the bees, please!". Significant change takes a significant amount of time and we can only hope that the next generation does not understand the reference.

**Spotlight:** From before the industrial revolution until midway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the business of food production drove national economies and technological advancement. The heart of that business has always been the farm. Today, the traditional farm enterprise—an organisational model developed over millennia—is struggling to stay viable within the industrial agriculture complex that controls modern food production. How can it be that an enterprise, which since the dawn of civilization has been economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable, is now on the verge of collapse and should this fact concern us?

Before continuing this investigation, we must determine whether farms continue to be relevant. They employ approximately 2% of the population and contribute about 2% to GDP making their economic importance questionable. Their use of petrochemical fertilizers is one of the major sources of groundwater contamination raising environmental concerns. The urbanisation of our population has left the countryside empty turning farming communities into ghost towns with little social impact. These facts, representative of one truth, seem to favour agribusiness over farming. There are other facts, just as quantitative, based in the truth that farms can be socially important, ecologically friendly, and economically profitable, that paint exactly the opposite picture. As so often is the case, the facts are contradictory nullifying a purely quantitative analysis and making the qualitative assessment the deciding factor.

Does the apple taste different? Does where, or by whom it is grown matter? Does where, or by whom it is sold matter? These questions indicate that the fate of the farm rests in the heart and mind of the consumer because the consumer decides what makes food valuable. If we, the consumer, decide to define the value of food as more than simply its quantity divided by its price, then the farm has a future. That consumers are, in increasing numbers, asking questions that extend beyond price, "Is it organic, non-GMO, locally-grown?", holds out hope for the farm.

The search to create and communicate value is a theme universal to all enterprises. The strategies employed by farms can provide you with additional tools to strengthen your place in your customer's heart and mind. The truth that matters, perhaps in spite of the facts, is embodied in the relationship formed between the enterprise and its customers. The appropriate attention to the relationship allows you to do what seems impossible and in doing so, become an example of what is possible.

**Lexicon:** With its roots in the Old English dialect of Mercian, *truth* was originally an expression of faithfulness. Only much later did it gain the sense of being consistent with fact. Today, both senses of the word are still in wide usage. When you refer to "the truth", is it something personal and mutable or something general and absolute? As well, does your audience know which sense you intend?

**Links:** For a grassroots perspective on the farm crises, visit the National Farmers Union websites, [www.nfu.org](http://www.nfu.org) (US) and [www.nfu.ca](http://www.nfu.ca) (Canada). Also, visit Organic Valley, [www.organicvalley.coop](http://www.organicvalley.coop), to see one response to that crisis.

**Musings:** Plunging my hands into soil is not an activity that attracts my interest. Viewed in the perspective of my heritage, I can only surmise that the gene responsible for tending a garden did not come with me as I emerged from my gene pool. I certainly cannot claim a lack of spending time in gardens as sensual memories of gardens fill all seasons of my childhood.

My memories of gardens are ripe and luscious, filled with people and produce in a most pleasing manner. In these memories, I find the roots of my passion for much that I hold dear. An appreciation for the wonder of creation, the importance of teamwork, and the cyclic nature of life are a few of the fruits that I picked from the vines in the gardens of my childhood. Within these small plots of land, the entire spectrum of life played out.

For some reason beyond my comprehension, my passion for gardens does not extend to tending my own. Perhaps for this reason, I look upon gardeners, and their gardens, with admiration and reverence.

**Facts & Figures:** In 1998, cereal companies Kellogg's, Quaker Oats, and General Mills enjoyed return on equity rates of 56%, 156%, and 222% respectively. While a bushel of corn sold for less than \$4, a bushel of corn flakes sold for \$133 making the cereal companies 186 to 740 times more profitable than the farms.

**Quote:** Writer Thomas Moore presents a challenge to the idea of truth:

*"The idea of truth is a fence that keeps out others who have a different truth. It is the grandest illusion, in which we believe and to which we attach our hopes. It is generally opaque, while the illusions that lead to understanding and justice are transparent. They allow life to pass through them, whereas truth is a sentry keeping life out."*