

Two lists: the six points from “Good Economic Sense—What Young Farmers Need to Know” was read by Mary Berry at the T40 Conference last fall. Mary Berry’s husband Steve Smith wrote the list. It bears repeating, rereading, resharing. The second list of nine points is from a story by Mary’s father Wendell Berry entitled “The Branch Way of Doing,”

Good Economic Sense— What Young Farmers Need to Know

1. We have substituted fossil fuels for knowledge and now farmers are cut off from the information we need most—how to build and maintain healthy soil.
2. Most of the information given to farmers these days is sales talk. We must stop looking for store-bought solutions and use what is free and at hand: animal manure, compost, cover crops, crop rotations, genetic diversity, seed saving, natural systems and cycles, husbandry, thrift, frugality, local economics, local communities.
3. We must rethink the way we market our crops, adding value to them when and where we can. Forming relationships with your buyers is the simplest, easiest way to do this. By allowing your customers to get to know you through CSAs, farmers markets, direct marketing, and so forth, you add value to your farm products and strengthen the local economy.
4. If you can clear \$6000 or more per acre, how many acres do you really need? Not that many. By using small scale technology, low cost and no cost techniques, there is no need to borrow a lot of money and lots of reasons not to; the most important being—if you go too deep into debt neither you nor your land will have the last say.
5. It is not simple, the details of the farming operation need to be written down on paper, just a working set of plans that include budgets, crop rotations, seed varieties, planting dates, harvest schedules, buyers, markets and so forth, the market. The market plan will require the most work. Remember to do your marketing before you do your planting.
6. Farmers need to know that we have very few friends in high places. The global economy does not have our best interest at heart. Agribusiness corporations do not have our best interest at heart. We must, therefore, look to those who do: our friends and neighbors, our local communities and local economies.

This list, and its accompanying article, now lives on The Berry Center website at www.berrycenter.org/good-economic-sense.

The Branch Way of Doing

1. Be happy with what you’ve got. Don’t be always looking for something better.
2. Don’t buy anything you don’t need.
3. Don’t buy what you ought to save. Don’t buy what you ought to make.
4. Unless you absolutely have got to do it, don’t buy anything new.
5. If somebody tries to sell you something to “save labor,” look out. If you can work, then work.
6. If other people want to buy a lot of new stuff and fill up the country with junk, use the junk.
7. Some good things are cheap, even free. Use them first.
8. Keep watch for what nobody wants. Sort through the leavings.
9. You might know, or find out, what it is to need help. So help people.

The Wendell Berry short story from which this list is excerpted can be read at www.threepennyreview.com/samples/berry_f14.html. Wendell Berry, a farmer and environmental activist who lives in Kentucky, writes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.



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