

# Nature

The literary critic Raymond Williams famously observed that the "nature" is perhaps the most complex word in the English language because,

"The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history."

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" 1983

The Classical myth of Nature tells us that nature is the primordial, pristine non-human given, that human touch transforms through our proclivity to farm and to build.



## Cicero and the Iterative Natures

First nature - wilderness - is the realm of the gods, but it is also the raw material for second nature.

In *De natura deorum* Cicero wrote "We sow corn, we plant trees, we fertilize the soil by irrigation, we dam the rivers and direct them where we want. In short, by means of our hands we try to create as it were a second nature within the natural world."

Jacopo Bonfadio wrote in 1541 that formal gardens make a "third nature, which I would not know how to name."

The illustration shows a distant mountain (first nature) giving way to cultivated agricultural land (second nature) and then a formal garden (third nature).



Frontispiece to l'Abbé de Vallemont's *Curiositez de la nature et de l'art* (1705)

# Pastoral Nature: The Agrarian Myth and the Yeoman Farmer

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# Virgil's Classical Agrarian Myth – Pastoral Arcadia

Virgil is credited in the *Eclogues* with establishing Arcadia as a poetic ideal that still resonates in Western literature and visual arts

Fortunate old man, here you'll find the cooling shade,  
among familiar streams and sacred springs.  
Here, as always, on your neighbor's boundary, the hedge,  
its willow blossoms sipped by Hybla's bees,  
will often lull you into sleep with the low buzzing:  
there, under the high cliff, the woodsman sings to the breeze:  
while the loud wood-pigeons, and the doves,  
your delight, will not cease their moaning from the tall elm.



## English Pastoral Poetry

John Clare 1793-1864

Sweet it is to wind the rill,  
Sweet with thee to climb the hill,  
On whose lap the bullock free  
Chews his cud most placidly;  
Or o'er fallows bare and brown  
Beaten sheep-tracks wander down,  
Where the mole unwearied still  
Roots up many a crumbling hill,  
And the little chumbling mouse  
Gnarls the dead weed for her house,  
While the plough's unfeeling share  
Lays full many a dwelling bare;  
Where the lark with russet breast  
'Hind the big clod hides her nest,  
And the black snail's founder'd pace  
Finds from noon a hiding-place,  
Breaking off the scorching sun  
Where the matted twitches run.



# English Pastoral Poetry

## Pied Beauty

GLORY be to God for dappled things—  
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and  
plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins 1844-1889



Hopkins in 1888



## Yeoman Farmer

The creation of the United States of America coincided with a time when European intellectuals were reassessing the place of agriculture in society.

The concept of farming (and the farmer) was taking on a new, elevated status in the minds of the day.

This notion of the noble cultivator of farm and family became a part of the foundation of the new democracy.



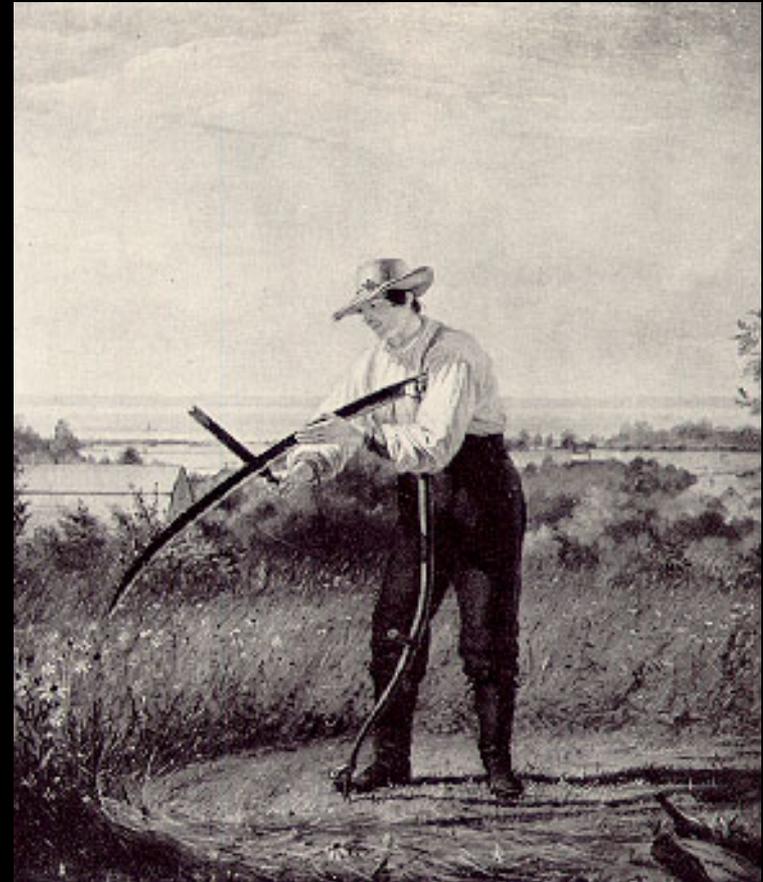
## Jefferson and the American Agrarian Myth

"Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, & they are tied to their country & wedded to its liberty & interests by the most lasting bands."

1785 Letter to John Jay

The yeoman farmer was portrayed as a self-reliant individual, the bedrock of democracy.

He owned a small farm and worked it with the help of his family and was seen as simple, honest, healthy because he lived close to nature.



The yeoman became a feature in American politics very early. The Federalist and Agrarian forces in government were divided in opinion just following the Revolution.

The Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, were in favor of a strong central government with most power in the hands the landed few, and looked to commercial and industrial expansion.

The Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson, believed in the primacy of local government and a mainly agrarian national economy, based on small independent farmers. Jefferson's Republicans favored the agrarian economy because farming was a noble profession as it kept people out of the corrupt cities and close to the soil and God.



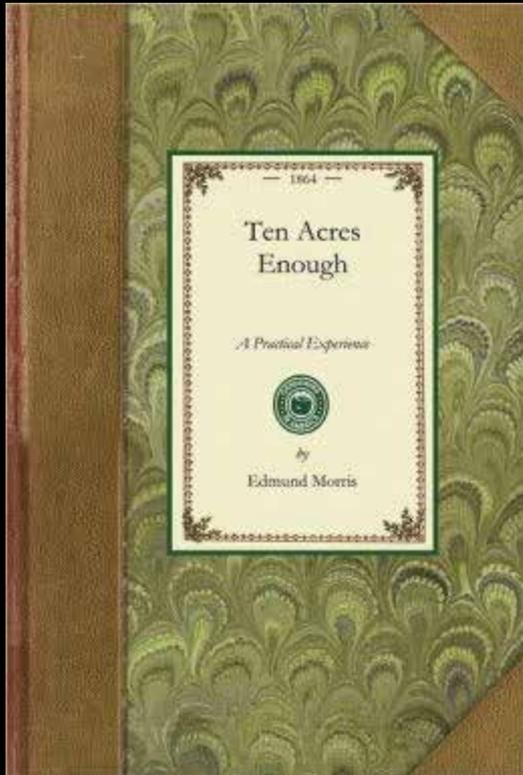
# Agrarianism

Agrarianism refers to a social philosophy or political philosophy which values rural society as superior to urban society, the independent farmer as superior to the paid worker, and sees farming as a way of life that can shape the ideal social values.

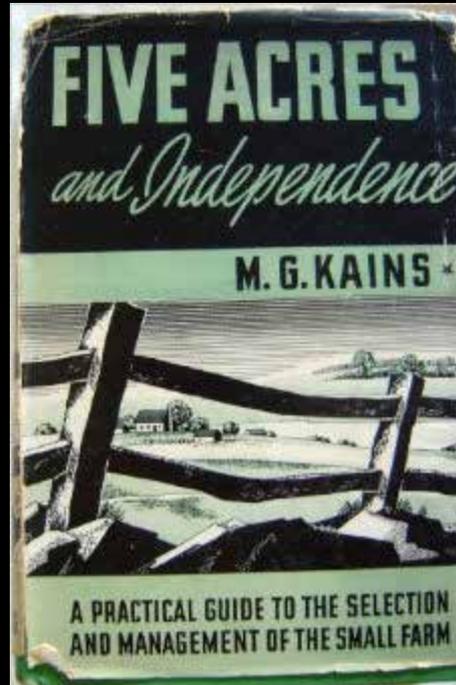
It stresses the superiority of a simpler rural life as opposed to the complexity of city life, with its banks and factories.



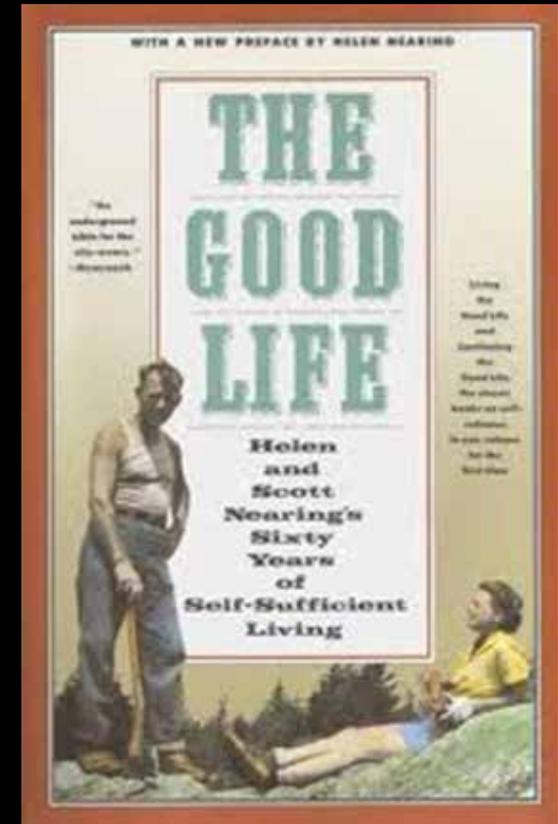
# American back-to-the-land movements



1864

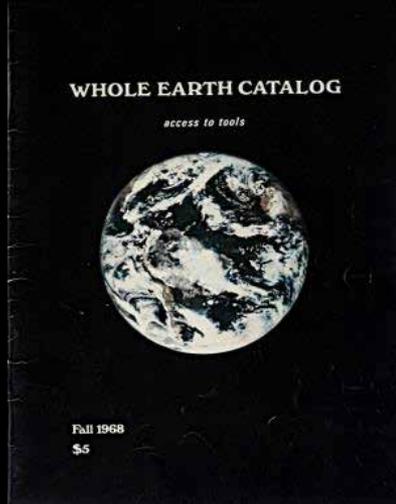


1935

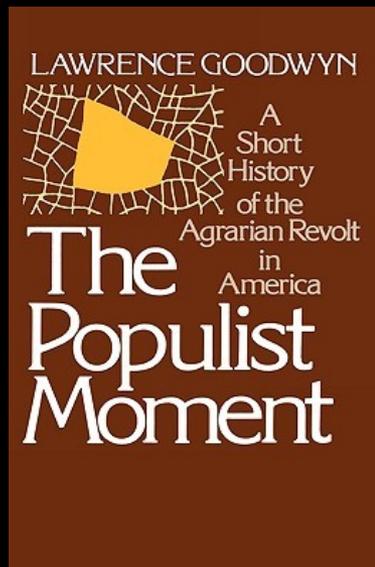
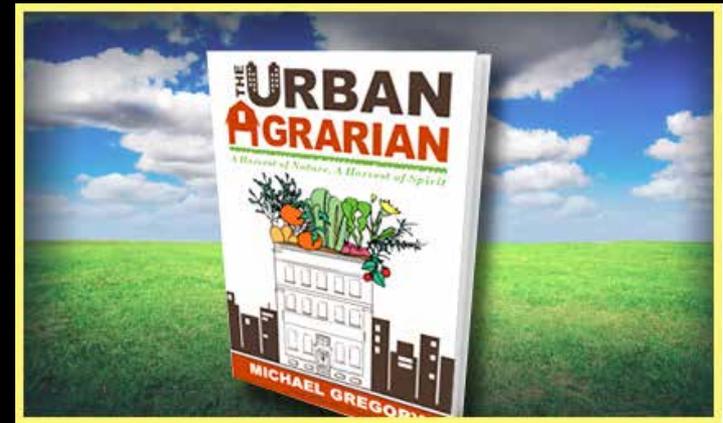
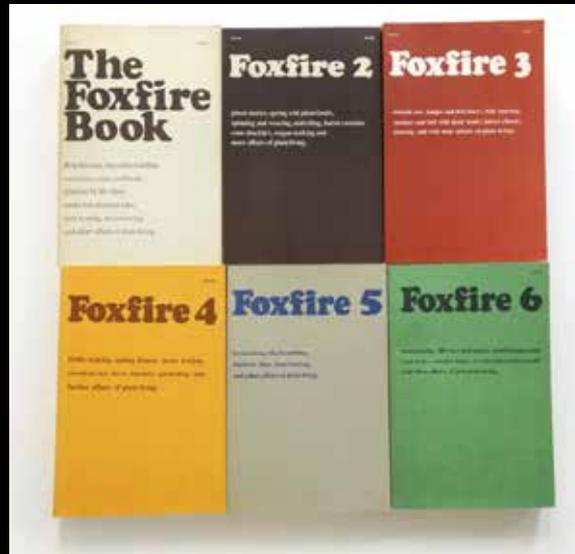


1970

This Agrarian narrative/myth is still a powerful one in modern/postmodern urban America.



## Urban Agrarian Movement



# Nature in Rural America



## Susan Fenimore Cooper 1813-1894

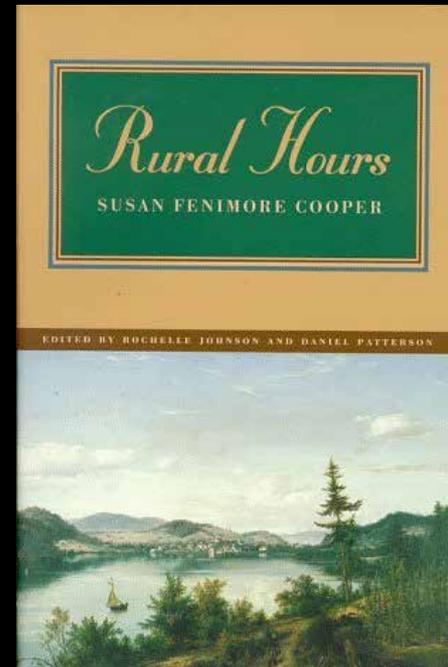
The eldest daughter of American novelist James Fenimore Cooper, was an amateur naturalist and a successful author in her own right. Her nature diary, *Rural Hours* (1850), covering two years in Cooperstown, New York, was consulted by Henry David Thoreau while he was composing *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854).

In the preface to *Rural Hours*, Cooper describes her book as "the simple record of those little events which make up the course of the seasons in rural life. . . . In wandering about the fields, during a long, unbroken residence in the country, one naturally gleans many trifling observations on rustic matters."

"While observing, this afternoon, the smooth fields about us, it was easy, within the few miles of country in sight at the moment, to pick out parcels of land in widely different conditions, and we amused ourselves by following upon the hill-sides the steps of the husbandman, from the first rude clearing, through every successive stage of tillage, all within range of the eye at the same instant.

...

But, there are softer touches also, telling the same story of recent cultivation. It frequently, happens, that walking about our farms, among rich fields, smooth and well worked, one comes to a low bank, or some little nook, a strip of land never yet cultivated, though surrounded on all sides by ripening crops of eastern grains and grasses. One always knows such places by the pretty native plants growing there."



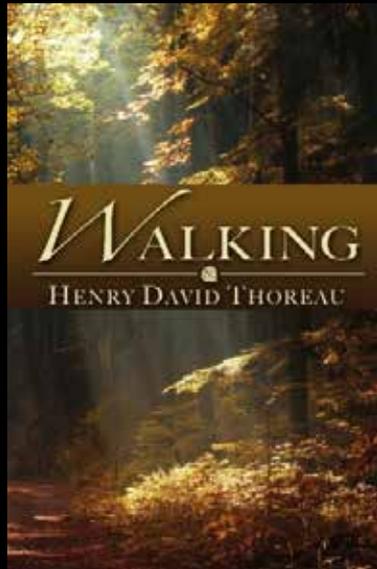
# American Nature - Wildness and Wilderness

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (1851)

The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world. Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plow and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind.

Life consists with Wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors, who grew fast and made infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by the raw material of life. He would be climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest trees.

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.



# American Pastoral Nature - Henry David Thoreau and the Bean Field and Cultivated Nature

MEANWHILE MY BEANS, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted, were impatient to be hoed, for the earliest had grown considerably before the latest were in the ground; indeed they were not easily to be put off.

What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not.

I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antæus.

But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows. This was my curious labor all summer — to make this portion of the earth's surface, which had yielded only cinquefoil, blackberries, johnswort, and the like, before, sweet wild fruits and pleasant flowers, produce instead this pulse.

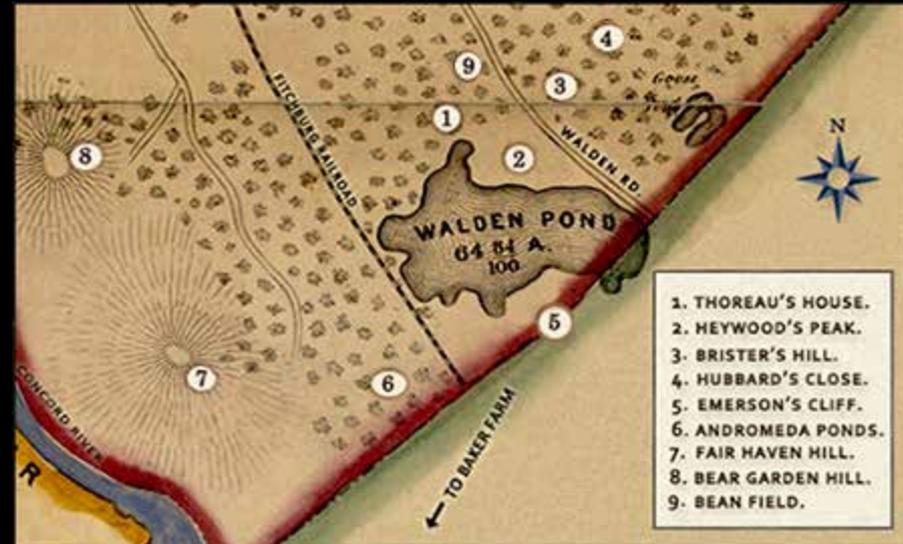
## WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS.

By HENRY D. THOREAU,  
AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS."



I do not propose to write an ode to deities, but to keep as faithfully as the poet to the meaning, attaching no idea of deity to his own imagination. — Page 10.

BOSTON:  
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.  
1836. 23 C.



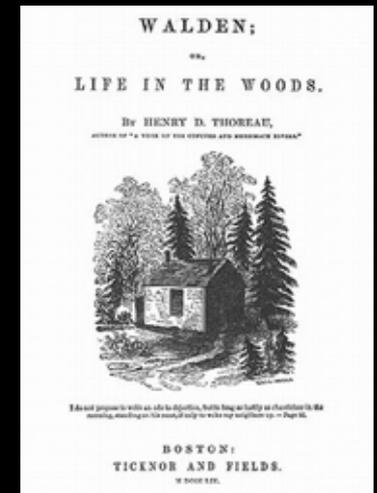
## Agricultural Knowledge

I was determined to know beans. When they were growing, I used to hoe from five o'clock in the morning till noon, and commonly spent the rest of the day about other affairs. Consider the intimate and curious acquaintance one makes with various kinds of weeds — it will bear some iteration in the account, for there was no little iteration in the labor — disturbing their delicate organizations so ruthlessly, and making such invidious distinctions with his hoe, levelling whole ranks of one species, and sedulously cultivating another.

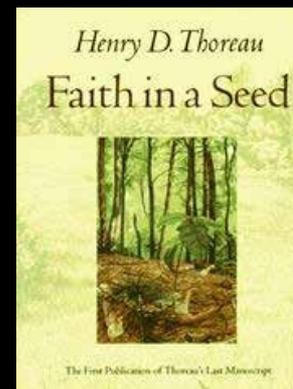
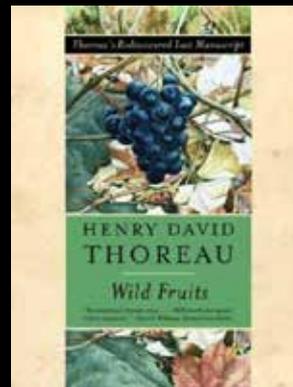
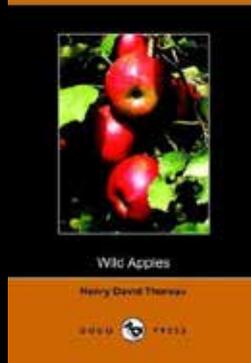
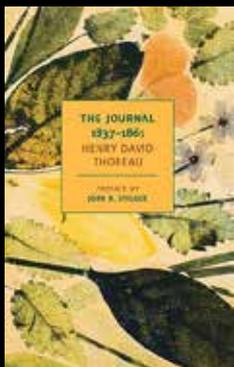


## Wild and Domesticated Connected

We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction. They all reflect and absorb his rays alike, and the former make but a small part of the glorious picture which he beholds in his daily course. In his view the earth is all equally cultivated like a garden.



Published 1854

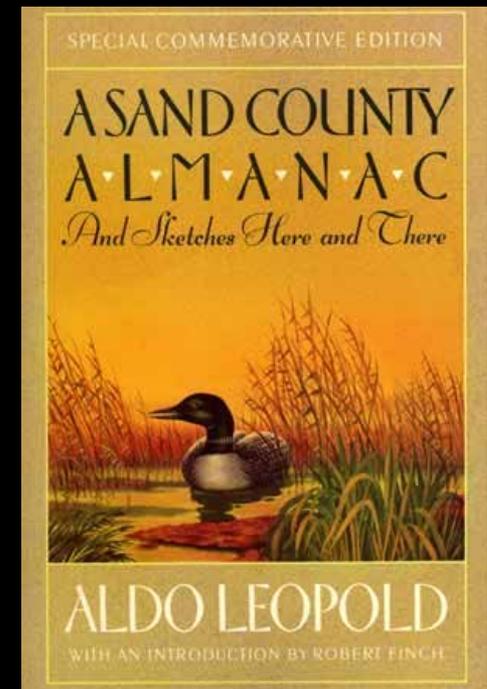


## A Sand County Almanac– Aldo Leopold

- On this sand farm in Wisconsin, first worn out and then abandoned by our bigger and better society, we try to rebuild, with shovel and axe, what we are losing elsewhere. It is here that we seek—and still find—our meat from God.
- The land ethic: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."
- What more delightful avocation than to take a piece of land and by cautious experimentation to prove how it works. What more substantial service to conservation than to practice it on one's own land?"



Aldo Leopold 1887-1948



## Meddling with the Land

I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist, and written not a few myself, but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land. Signatures of course differ, whether written with axe or pen, and this is as it should be.



## Sportsmanship – Hunting and Fishing

There is value in any experience that exercises those ethical restraints collectively called “sportsmanship.” ...A peculiar virtue in wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct...Voluntary adherence to an ethical code elevates the self-respect of the sportsman, but it should not be forgotten that voluntary disregard of the code degenerates and depraves him.

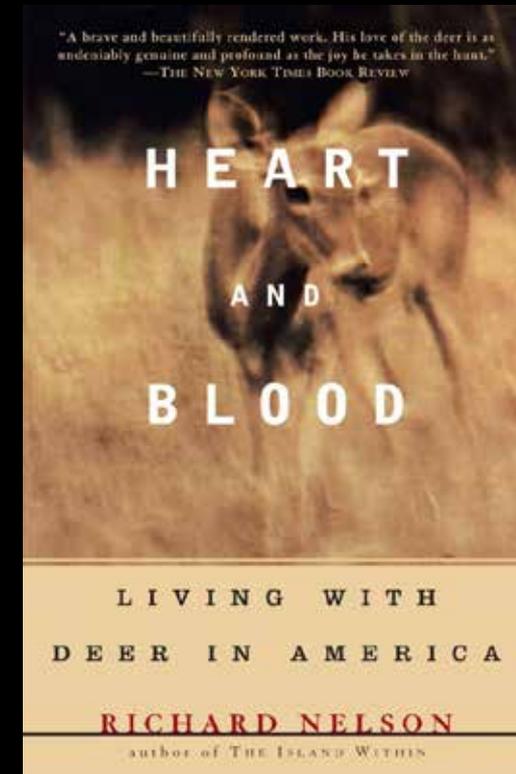
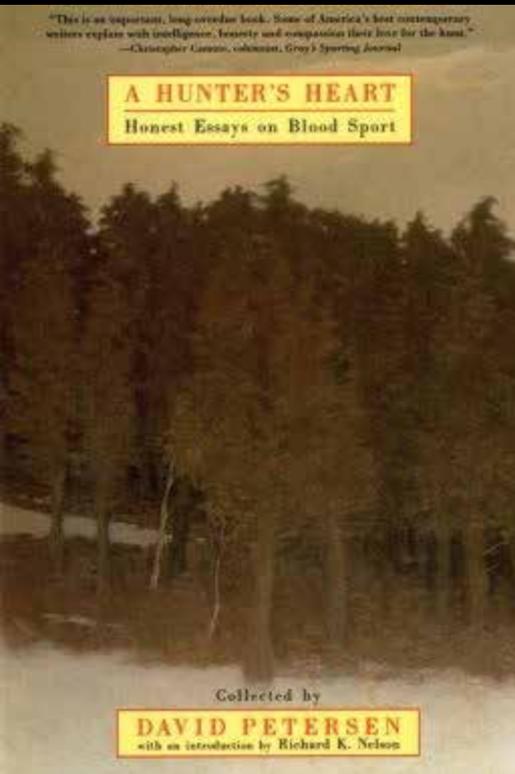


# Hunting and Dogs

"October - Red Lanterns" from *A Sand County Almanac*

One way to hunt partridge is to make a plan...another is to wander, quite aimlessly, from one red lantern to another. This will likely take you where the birds actually are. The lanterns are blackberry leaves, red in October sun...Partridge hunting, then, is a creekside stroll, upwind, from one briar patch to another...the dog, when he approaches the briars, looks around to make sure I am within gunshot...My dog, by the way, thinks I have much to learn about partridges, and, being a professional naturalist, I agree.

## The first deer hunt



# Conservation and Farming

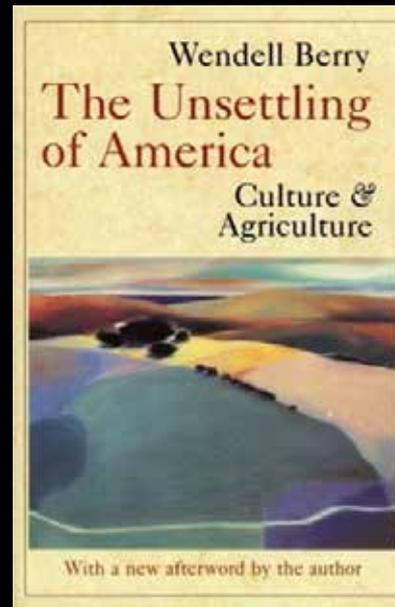
Wendell Berry b. 1938

But we cannot hope – for reasons practical and humane, we cannot even wish – to preserve more than a small portion of the land in wilderness. Most of it we will have to use. The conservation movement swings from self-righteous outrage to self-deprecation because it has neglected this issue. Its self-contradictions can only be reconciled – and the conservation impulse made to function as ubiquitously and variously as it needs to – by understanding, imagining, and living out the possibility of “kindly use”

Kindly use depends upon intimate knowledge, the most sensitive responsiveness and responsibility...the understanding of kindly use in agriculture must encompass both farm and household...

[More on this in October...]

1977



# Nature and Agricultural Lessons

2010 National Humanities Medalist Lecture

As many hunters, farmers, ecologists, and poets have understood, Nature (and here we capitalize her name) is the impartial mother of all creatures, unpredictable, never entirely revealed, not my mother or your mother, but nonetheless our mother.

If we are observant and respectful of her, she gives good instruction.

As Albert Howard, Wes Jackson, and others have carefully understood, she can give us the right patterns and standards for agriculture.

If we ignore or offend her, she enforces her will with punishment.

She is always trying to tell us that we are not so superior or independent or alone or autonomous as we may think.

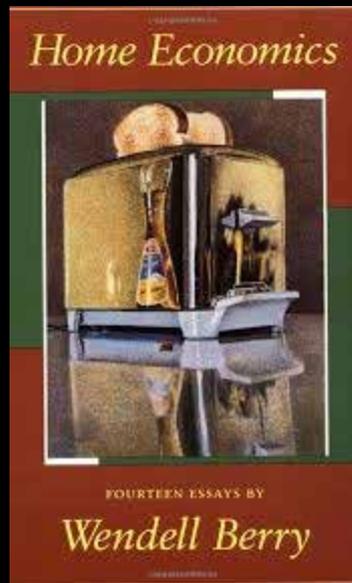


# Wildness in the Human Economy

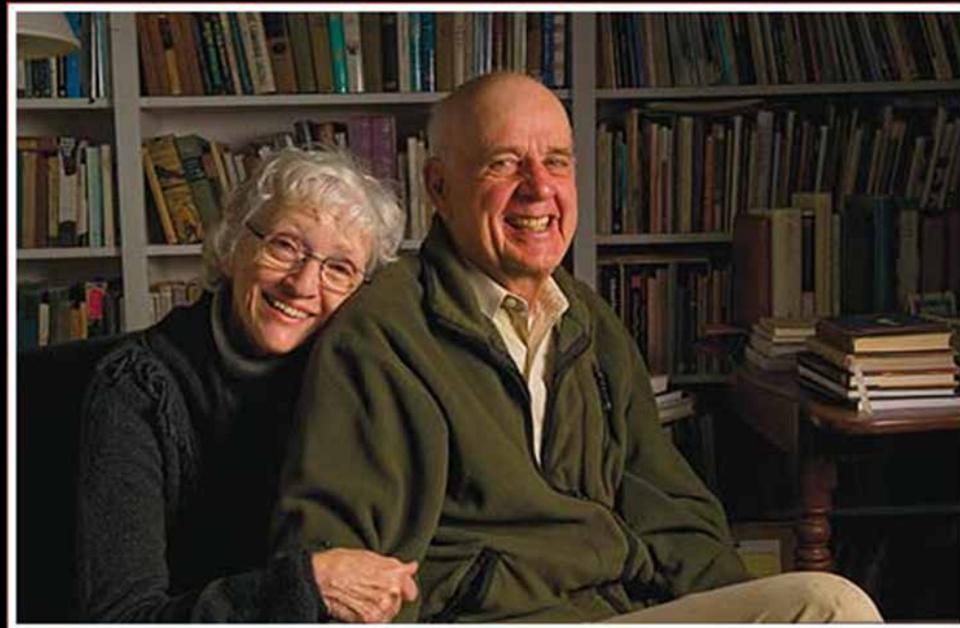
“Getting Along with Nature” *Home Economics*

What I am aiming at – because a lot of evidence seems to point this way – is the probability that nature and human culture, wildness and domesticity, are not opposed but are interdependent. Authentic experience of either will reveal the need of one for the other. In fact, examples from both past and present prove that a human economy and wildness can exist together not only in compatibility but to their mutual benefit.

To argue for the necessity of wildness to, and in, the human economy is by no means to argue against the necessity of wilderness. The survival of wilderness – of places that we do not change, where we allow the existence even of creatures we perceive as dangerous – is necessary. Our sanity probably requires it...and I would argue that we do not need just the great public wildernesses, but millions of small private or semiprivate ones. Every farm should have one; wildernesses can occupy corners of factory grounds and city lots – places where nature is given a free hand, where no human work is done, where people go only as guests.



1987

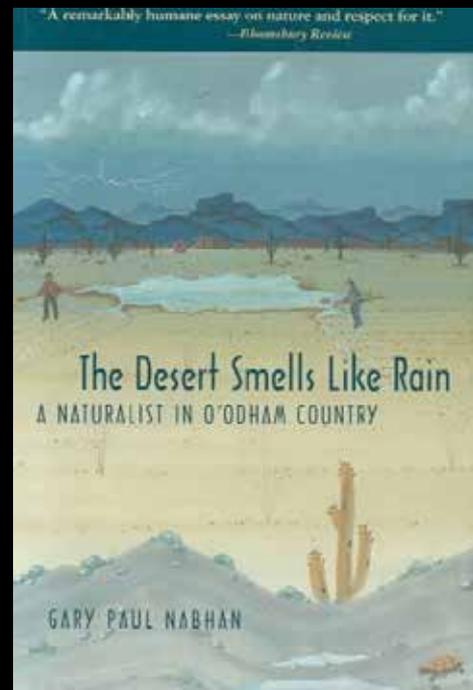


# Agriculture and Biodiversity

## Study of two Sonora Desert oases

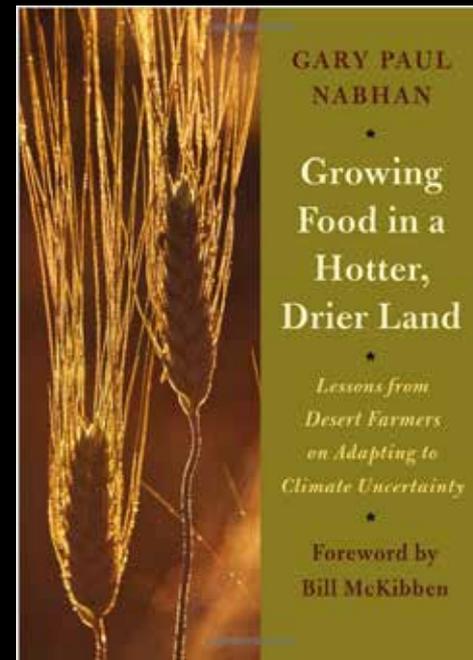
### Oasis 1 in Arizona

Park Service removed the Papago Indians who had lived and farmed there to make it a bird sanctuary, "an odd thing is happening to their "natural" bird sanctuary. They are losing the heterogeneity of the habitat, and with it, the birds. The old trees are dying...Summer annual seed plants are conspicuously absent...without the soil disturbance associated with plowing and flood irrigation, these natural foods for birds and rodents no longer germinate."



### Oasis 2 in Mexico

The other oasis...still thrives because a Papago village is still there, still farming. Twice as many bird species are found at this oasis. Mr. Nabhan's Papago friend Remedio, explained it this way: "That's because those birds, they come where the people are. When the people live and work in a place, and plant their seeds and water their trees, the birds go and live with them. They like those places, there's plenty to eat and that's when we are friends to them."



### Purple Martins, Hornsby Bend

# The Soil is a Divine Drug

## The Man Born to Farming

The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming, whose hands reach into the ground and sprout, to him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie down in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn. His thought passes along the row ends like a mole. What miraculous seed has he swallowed that the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water descending in the dark?

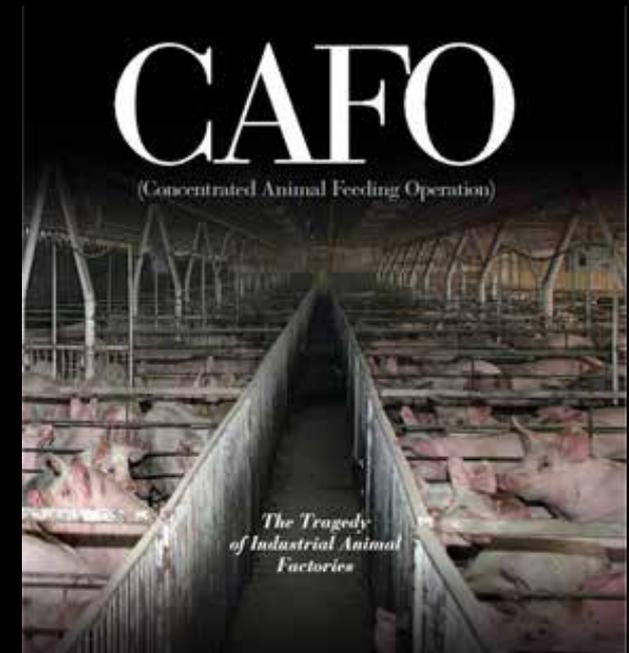


# Farming and Machines and Industrial Agriculture

## Lads of the Fair - Brian McNeill

My brother, he's a plowman,  
and I'm for the feeing now, man  
And we'll drink to the price o' the harvest corn  
in Falkirk town the morn

The work o' the weaver's over,  
likewise the days of the drover  
And the plowboy sits on a tractor now,  
too high to see the clover  
The workin's not so steady,  
but the lads are all still ready  
To drink to the health of the working man  
in Falkirk town the morn



## Domesticated Animals





I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd;  
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition;  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;  
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God;  
Not one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania of owning things;  
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago;  
Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth.

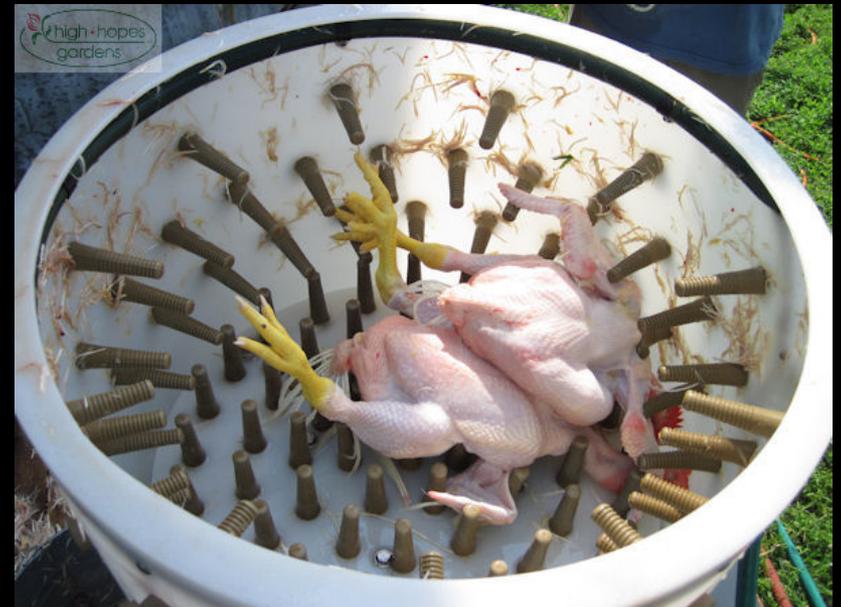
Walt Whitman





## On-Farm Chicken Processing

I won't go into all the steps of butchering chickens, but will show what the chickens look like after they are scalded and through the tub plucker. We did 39 chickens in the morning – we had hoped to get going by 6 am, but the rain didn't stop until 8 (now rain 23 of 26 days in June). We were through by 11:30. It seemed to go better than the first time. We broke in Emma on the eviscerating line, and Martin caught chickens, turned the plucker off and on and ran bagged chickens to the freezer or refrigerator. Emma and Linda cut up 20 for quick meals of chicken breast or other parts and we sold a few of the rest. Still have about 50 to do later this week.



# Rural Nature - Chores

## Aldo Leopold – The Spiritual Dangers of not owning a farm

There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.

To avoid the first danger, one should plant a garden, preferably where there is no grocer to confuse the issue.

To avoid the second, he should lay a split of good oak on the andirons, preferably where there is no furnace, and let it warm his shins while a February blizzard tosses the trees outside. If one has cut, split, hauled, and piled his own good oak and let his mind work the while, he will remember much about where the heat comes from, and with a wealth of detail denied to those who spend the week end in town astride a radiator.









Rural scene, a rural scene,  
Sweet especial rural scene.

Gerard Manley Hopkins  
"Binsey Poplars"