

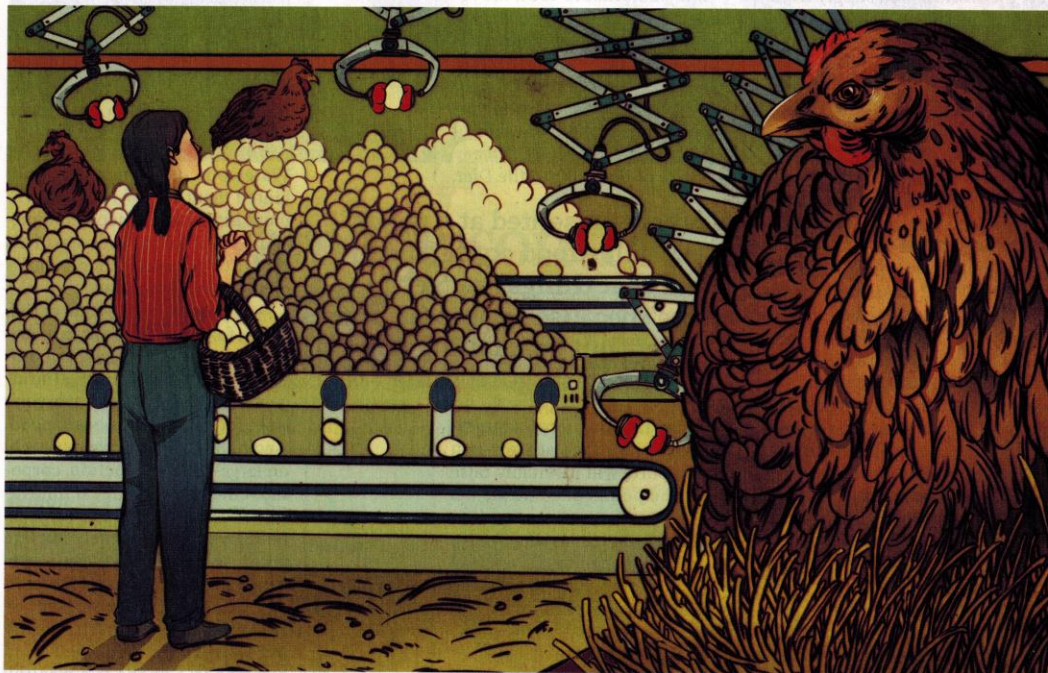
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The Rant

Small isn't beautiful

The sustainable food movement wants the government to ban imports and limit factory food. The result would leave us all poorer—and hungrier

Let's start with the bad news.

Poultry and egg production are up. The farm sector as a whole is becoming more efficient. Total Canadian agricultural exports last year amounted to \$56 billion, making us the sixth-largest supplier of food to the world. Globally, the percentage of humanity suffering from hunger has fallen by half since 1990, and here at home, food expenses amount to just 10% of the average household's budget—down from 18% over the past half-century.

Wait, you might be thinking,

This is the bad news?

Perhaps not to most coherent thinkers, but these are grim tidings for the sustainable food movement. For these folks—local food activists, and allied academics and politicians—low-cost food, rising efficiency and healthy international trade all herald the apocalypse.

Local food has been having a moment—for about the past decade. Restaurants and food stores now go to great lengths to ensure your food travels no farther than you do. Organic is the premium

brand. And who doesn't love a farmers' market? Together, these various urges and consumer preferences have been conscripted into a broader movement that advocates total food self-sufficiency as its Platonic ideal. But while living off the land may have a certain romantic charm, when taken to its logical conclusion, the sustainable food movement's proposition promises great damage to the modern business of food and the people who rely on it.

With Ottawa promising a new national food policy shortly, there's good reason to take the proposals being made by the sustainable food movement seriously. At a September conference put on by Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Sustainable Food Systems in Waterloo, Ontario, a group of about 100 academics and food

\$333 BILLION/205,000 EMPLOYEES

Revenue generated by Apple, Alphabet (parent of Google) and Facebook worldwide in 2015

\$244 BILLION/675,000 EMPLOYEES

Revenue generated by Kodak, IBM and AT&T in 1993

activists, amply supplied with government grants, came from as far away as Italy and South Africa to plot strategies on how to convert the world's food supply from the current system—based on the relentless pursuit of efficiency—into something that's universally local, organic and slow.

A key document unveiled at the conference was "Food Counts: A Pan-Canadian Sustainable Food Systems Report Card," which purports to score various aspects of Canada's agricultural sector in hopes of influencing Ottawa's new food policy. It is an unusual piece of work. Rising egg production is considered evidence that things are "getting worse" because it reflects growing productivity on Canadian farms. Falling hog production gets a positive mark for the opposite reason. Small is good. Growth, efficiency and incorporation are all bad.

Another report greeted with overwhelming support at the conference was the work of Kent Mullinix, director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, British Columbia. His objective: demonstrate how southwest B.C. could become nearly self-sufficient in food through a total ban on the province's thriving agri-food exports. The goal has been widely cheered by an audience that considers all international trade in food—imports or exports—to be evidence of "food neo-liberalism." The necessary doubling of regional agricultural output would require a massive reallocation of urban capital

and labour back to the land, simply to feed everyone. It's the sort of thing Cambodia tried once. Unsuccessfully.

"The sustainable food movement is pushing policy-makers in a direction that is very detrimental to our economic prosperity," says Pierre Desrochers, an economic geographer at the University of Toronto and co-author of the book *The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-Mile Diet*.

A report presented at a recent sustainable food conference noted that things are "getting worse" because egg production is rising, but that falling hog production is a good thing

Any mandate that forces domestic production to replace low-cost food imports will inevitably raise prices, he points out. "Residents will end up paying more for their food. And that means they'll have less to spend on other things."

Gains in employment and output in the agricultural sector will be offset by proportionately bigger losses everywhere else. Shutting down lucrative exports will have similarly harmful effects. The result will be lower incomes, more poverty, more hunger and greater damage to the environment, as more land is enlisted to feed provincial mouths.

The odds that the sustainable food movement convinces Ottawa to ban agri-food exports and pursue Khmer Rouge-style self-sufficiency may be remote.

Nonetheless, its goals are often incorporated in public efforts in hidden ways, Desrochers observes. Schools and hospitals frequently impose local food mandates, silently raising costs and eroding efficiency. Municipalities might similarly create zoning restrictions for the benefit of local farmers and to the detriment of larger, more efficient production elsewhere. At the Waterloo conference, Mullinix hinted that the new NDP government in B.C. could soon commission a provincewide version of his report on imposing food autarky on the Lower Mainland.

No one disputes the right of rich urban folk to enjoy their farmers' markets and organic kale smoothies. If you can afford the indulgence, why not? But for everyone else, food remains a basic need. And to fill this need, we must rely on large-scale production, corporate efficiency, technical innovation and the vast benefits of trade. Policies that deliberately impede progress by preventing the emergence of new crops and technology, or by blocking comparative advantages, threaten the ability of the world to feed itself. And remember: Canada is a wealthy nation because we require a relatively small domestic agricultural labour force to put food on our tables, allowing everyone else to pursue other, higher-value efforts. Abandoning this in a nostalgic search for an authentic meal will leave us all poorer and hungrier.

There is nothing less sustainable than the sustainable food movement. /Peter Shawn Taylor

FOUNDERS LEAVING

Some leaders become so synonymous with their companies' brands that their departures leave behind gaping holes. Here are five who announced they were leaving this year.

GRAYDON CARTER

VANITY FAIR
Carter stepped down after 25 years as editor-in-chief. He wanted to stick around until after the election to continue antagonizing Donald Trump, whom he has loathed since the 1980s, calling him a "short-fingered vulgarian."



TRAVIS KALANICK

UBER
Co-founder Kalanick's alpha-bro persona shaped Uber's corporate culture and ultimately led to his exit in June amid a growing sexual harassment scandal.



HOWARD SCHULTZ

STARBUCKS
Schultz gave up the CEO title in April (for the second time—he took an eight-year hiatus in 2000) but will stay on as executive chair, focusing on the upscale chain Starbucks Reserve Roastery.



JEFFREY IMMELT

GENERAL ELECTRIC
Jack Welch was once synonymous with GE. Then along came Immelt, who transformed it into a digital-industrial giant. But the stock languished, and an investor pushed for his ouster this summer.



DAVID COTE

HONEYWELL
When Cote took over in 2002, Honeywell was bleeding cash. Last year, it had \$4.8 billion in earnings—and Cote himself earned a reported \$436 million. He left in March.



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