

# KEEPING THE FAITH

Wendell Berry's Life and Work celebrated in new book

By Rhonda Reeves

In editing the new book, *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, Jason Peters freely admits his introduction to the Kentucky author's work came by way of "copyright infringement, I guess you could say." A friend of his sent him a copy of Berry's essay, "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," after *What Are People For?* had come out.



Photo by Guy Mendes

Such tacitly sanctioned "loans" are a time-honored tradition as literary introductions go. Hordes of blogs and websites are devoted to sharing the joys of the agricultural sustainability movement inspired by literary heroes such as Berry (e.g., [ecoliteracy.org](http://ecoliteracy.org); [eatlocal.net](http://eatlocal.net); [eatlocalchallenge.com](http://eatlocalchallenge.com); [realgood-food.com](http://realgood-food.com); [locavores.com](http://locavores.com)).

cies online feel a certain good-natured immunity and impunity. Despite his confessed opposition to globalism, the technology available for potential international information-sharing geared toward furthering the work of a good cause (sustainability, eating locally, etc) would have to impress even the most avowed Luddite.

## The Art of Buying Nothing

Kentucky native Barbara Kingsolver (author of *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, a current bestseller in the literary jour-

**"Participating in agriculture gives me back my sensory life. After more than 20 years in professional kitchens, your senses can become dull. I am blessed that I have a small place, in a small town, just down the road from a plethora of local, organic, fantastic, vegetables, cheeses, meats, fruits, wine, grits, even—in good years—hickory nuts."**

**—Chef Ouita Michel**



Presumably, since Berry confessed, in print, his aversion to purchasing the aforementioned computer some years back, those who freely share and trade his literary lega-

Or maybe it wouldn't, but as paradoxes go, it's an attractive one. Next up: the Tractor Conundrum.

nalism category) addresses the computer question in her superb contribution to the collection, "The Art of Buying Nothing." In it, she explains the dilemma of the many years she'd

# Some Like it Hot:

## The BEST Books About Eating, Summer 2006 and 2007

The two best books about eating to come along in recent years are both masterpieces of literary journalism.

Last summer, it was Bill Buford's *Heat* (meticulously detailing his "culinary boot camp"—a journey that took him from infamous New York kitchens to an apprenticeship for a crazy Panzano butcher).

This summer it's Kentucky native Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (chronicling the year her family spent eating locally).

Buford writes of his odyssey, in *Heat*, "When I started, I hadn't wanted a restaurant. What I wanted was the know-how of people who ran restaurants. I didn't want to be a chef; just a cook. And my experiences in Italy had taught me why. For millenia, people have known how to make their food. They have understood animals and what to do with them, have cooked with the season and had a farmer's knowledge of the way the planet works.... People don't have this kind of knowledge today, even though it seems as fundamental as the earth, and, it's true, those who do have it tend to be professionals—like chefs. But I didn't want this knowledge in order to be a professional; just to be more human." (See also, *Ace* July 13, 2006).



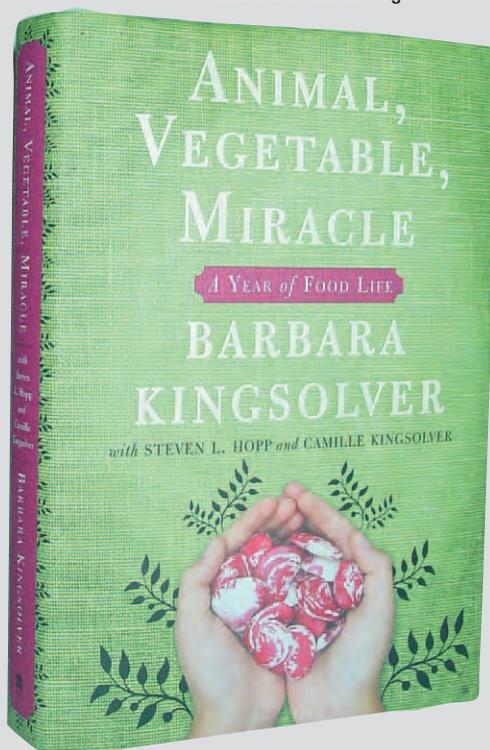
In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*,

Kingsolver writes of her family's year of eating seasonally and locally, and supporting sustainable family farms, "it's a strategy that will keep grocery money in the neighborhood, where it gets recycled into your own school system and local businesses. The green spaces surrounding your town stay green, and farmers who live nearby get to grow more food next year, for you." (See also, *Ace*, June 7, 2007).

For the purposes of the locavore movement, many advocates define "local" as grown within an hour of where you live.

Both of these books are a mandatory personal library addition for anyone who's serious about food and serious about eating, but still manages not to take himself too seriously. ■

—RR



"resisted acquiring a cell phone." She thought people asking for her cell number sounded like a request for her "prison address" and admits she "was relieved not to have one." Her safe fall-back response was "I'll get a cell phone when Wendell Berry does."

And then her oldest daughter entered the teen years; pay phones disappeared from the streetscapes; and cell phones entered the Kingsolver household, while she remains devoted to the spirit of the idea, "for me, the thorniest passage is to raise a spiritual family in an overly material world."

After paraphrasing the points Berry had held forth on about his standards for purchasing a tool ("it should do better work; it should lose less energy; it should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence; it should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible" and so on), she summarizes succinctly, "I take the real point—I hope I'm not mistaken—to be this: acquisition of new things, any new things, in a person's life should be subjected to hard standards... the idea is that we ask the right questions as we walk toward every possibility of a new thing in our lives."



Photo by Guy Mendes

Barbara Kingsolver

### Eating is an Agricultural Act

"I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act."

—Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating" from *What Are People For?*

Of Berry's seminal essay on *The Pleasures of Eating*, one of Kentucky's most celebrated chefs, Ouita Michel says, "Those simple lines sum up everything I now feel about being a chef in Kentucky. The joy that comes from standing in a field and looking at little beans, squash blossoms and tomatoes, actually, just about anything including June bugs inspires me in a profound way."

From her work as a chef (encompassing her days at Emmett's to her current ownership of Holly Hill Inn), she says, "Over the years, the cycles of Kentucky farming have dominat-

ed my business, my cooking and my eating."

She says, "Participating in agriculture gives me back my sensory life. After more than 20 years in professional kitchens, your senses can become dull. You stop seeing what you are really cooking, you stop smelling and tasting. Ingredients can become just another cog in the restaurant wheel. I am blessed that I have a small place, in a small town, just down the road from a plethora of local, organic, fantastic, vegetables, cheeses, meats, fruits, wine, grits, even—in good years—hickory nuts.

Clearly, she lives within a community, adding, "And not only that, my friends bring them to me...and when I'm not running around like a chicken with my head cut off I get to visit or even, now and then, go to their farm and sit on the swing for a little gossip. Hey Las Vegas, you can have your huge digs with your \$200.00 tasting menus, you'll never set your teeth into a Kentucky tomato still warm from the sun on the front porch of the Holly Hill Inn.

On a personal note, she throws in a wistful postscript, "Despite all this romance, sometimes our eating isn't enough to keep a farmer farming and this is a personal note to David Wagoner: I miss your little carrots, your sorrel, and beautiful white, black and red currants, your stinging nettles, and the crazy Nordello peppers."

She concludes, "Thank you Wendell Berry for all of it and for especially writing *The Farm* which I sometimes read aloud from when I'm alone just to hear the sound of the words."

"Globalization has created the McDonaldization of world food, resulting in the destruction of sustainable food systems. It attempts to create a uniform food culture of hamburgers."

—Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest* (recommended reading)

Karin Rasmussen, co-owner of Herb 'n Renewal (corner of Vine and S. Upper summer Saturdays) says, "Eating is part of the great drama of life. The first act is in the hands of a farmer. The second act is in the mechanical claws of processors. The third act is in the trusty driving hands of the truckers. The final act is on the table of a consumer. It is a drama that we, as humans, cannot live without."

In support of eating locally and sustainably, she says, "I believe that more people are going back to the roots of the drama and seeking out locally grown foods. Unfortunately, there are still many who want a Kentucky homegrown peach in February!"

Echoing the sentiments Kingsolver expresses in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (their

family willingly gave up salmon and bananas and a few other former staples in their year of eating locally), Rasmussen says, "We need to learn that we can live the drama of life while enjoying what is readily available to us through local farmers markets, roadside stands and many supermarkets that now carry locally grown produce. It keeps the drama of life going strong. If it is not allowed to continue repeat performances, then the whole of our life will come to a final curtain call!"

One day at a time.

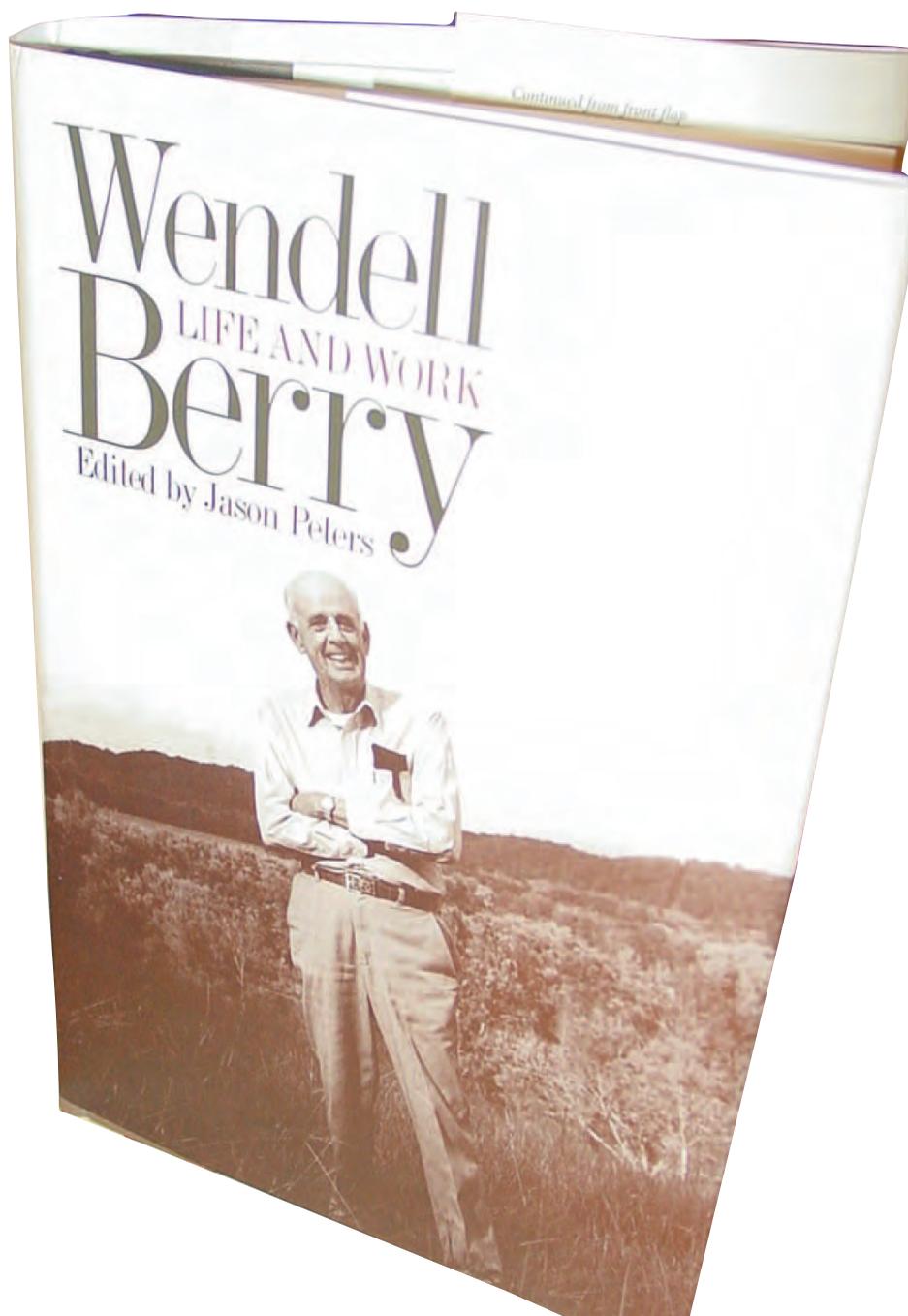
As Kingsolver writes in her contribution to the Berry collection, "I can survive in a thing-addicted society one day at a time, vowing I will get through today without buying any new stuff. Tomorrow also. Whether or not my small conservation has done the world any good, it will do me some good."

And whether or not you notice the

cycles of the land—this year's Spring hail-storm, the late frost, the crippling drought—eating IS still an agricultural act, for all of us. Pray against rain on behalf of your golf game or car wash, at your peril. Say a prayer instead for the likes of blessings Kingsolver enumerates, "a black and brown woolly worm hurrying into my path to deliver his late-breaking forecast...the tremble of leaves before a rising storm...The yellow curve of a new October moon."

It will do you some good. ■

Editor **Jason Peters** will sign **Wendell Berry: Life and Work**. 5:30pm -7pm., Friday July 27, Black Swan Books at 505 East Maxwell Street. Wendell Berry and several of the contributors to the book, (including **Norman Wirzba** and **Ed McClanahan**) will also be present to sign.



## Lexington's Community Garden Tour

In "The Pleasures of Eating" (from *What Are People For?*) Wendell Berry encourages readers to, "Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it. Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertilizer, Only by growing some food for yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to



decay, and around again; Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home: Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can of the economy and technology of industrial food production. What is added to food that is not food, and what do you pay for these additions?; Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening; Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species. The last suggestion seems particularly important to me. Many people are now as much estranged from the lives of domestic plants and animals (except for flowers and dogs and cats) as they are from the lives of the wild ones."

Photos courtesy Bruce Burris



If this sounds inspiring, you don't have to start from scratch. Lexington already has a Community Garden Movement. You can learn more about it on the upcoming **August 2** tour. If you can't attend, but want to be involved, email Lexington's Community Garden advocates to get involved in planning or to contribute in any way as an individual or as an organization: [jgembr0@cs.com](mailto:jgembr0@cs.com) or [latitudearts@yahoo.com](mailto:latitudearts@yahoo.com).

**Thursday August 2, 2007**  
**9 AM-12 PM (lunch afterwards)**

Get a close up view of the emerging **Lexington community garden movement**. Meet community organizers, elders and youth who are working on community gardens Learn how you can get involved to create backyard gardens, school gardens, community gardens, hospital gardens, Green Sanctuary programs, composting and more Help create plans for a Lexington Community and School Garden Conference. Tour will begin and end at:

### **THE ROCK/LA ROCA United Methodist Church** **1015 North Limestone St.**

Registration and refreshments will begin at 8:30am

The tour will begin at 9am

Transportation will be provided

Donations are graciously accepted

Registration is required. To register or for more information:

**859.312.7024, [jgembr0@cs.com](mailto:jgembr0@cs.com) or [latitudearts@yahoo.com](mailto:latitudearts@yahoo.com)**

**<http://www.sustainlex.org/>**

### **STOPS ON THE TOUR:**

The Lexington Community Garden Tour will travel around the city and stop at several community gardens including: Lexington Senior Center, Nelson Ave Garden, WECEP garden, The Rock/La Roca gardens, Ballard Place, Third Street Stuff and more! At the end of the Tour, lunch from local produce will be provided and information on gardening will be available.

**Organizations involved:** Ace Weekly, Lexington Senior Center, The Rock/La Roca United Methodist Church, Sustainable Communities Network, NorthEast Lexington Initiative, Bluegrass Partnership for a Green Community, Third Street Stuff, Teen Center, Ballard Place, Latitude Arts and others.

### **Ace's 20th Anniversary Community Garden:**

To get involved with the planning (and planting) of **Ace's 20th Anniversary Community Garden** on Jefferson Street, email [reeves@aceweekly.com](mailto:reeves@aceweekly.com). (A cookbook will also be published in conjunction with the garden project.) ■