

Toward A Bioregional Food Covenant

The fourth in a series on Watershed Discipleship toddwynward@gmail.com

We are making choices that will affect whether beings
thousands of generations from now
will be able to be born sound of mind and body.
Joanna Macy

To what extent can we thrive within the bounty—and the boundaries—of our bioregions? If we are to survive much longer as a species, many of us addicted to unbounded affluenza need to make this question central to our lives. As David Orr writes: "It makes far better sense to reshape ourselves to fit a finite planet than to attempt to reshape the planet to our infinite wants."

Here's a practical idea that might incite a movement: The 25/75/100 Bioregional Food Covenant. To join, an individual would make this pledge: "By the year 2025, I will source 75% of my food from within 100 miles."

Can a modest personal vow like this really make a big difference? In the face of the crises we face at a global scale, a personal vow like this may seem insignificant. But think again: if a critical mass of us join in, this humble promise could change how humans live on our planet. Let us count the ways:

It enriches local economies. Thousands of families committing local for the long term establishes new demand and new markets, creating an incubator for regional companies to grow, sell and distribute good food within their communities. Hard-earned cash becomes "slow money," circulating longer within the region, causing more healthy cycles of exchange for local goods and services. Right now, there are few local growers and very little local food available in America because most of us don't demand it.

It corrects our crazy consumption. Sourcing much of our food locally means adapting to our watershed, letting it instruct us how to be. It means learning to live within healthy natural limits. It means no longer being able to buy whatever I want whenever I want from wherever I want, without a second thought to planetary consequences.

It improves individual health. Kale..or Krispy Kreme? This may not be a fair comparison, but the point is this: when communities encourage one another to eat food produced off the land, better health is likely to develop. Affordable access to farm-fresh food is a promising antidote to many of modern society's illnesses.

It reduces our dependence on petroleum, packaging and pollution. Currently, the majority of mega-chain food travels a thousand miles or more to reach your local grocery store. Massive amounts of petroleum are used to improve soil, grow, process, store, preserve, package and deliver food that could be grown and transported within a

few miles of home. Reduced travel and storage means reduced packaging and pollution.

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What if community organizations took on bioregional food covenants, committing to healthy, local, affordable food for all?

It would build basins of relations across race and class. Brock Dolman writes that everyone on the planet lives in a basin of relations: “Everything we do for work, play, school, shopping, farming, recreation and so on occurs in a watershed somewhere.” What if those who could afford it signed on to a bioregional food covenant for themselves and for another family? What if congregations or schools or clubs became communities of care and made the promise for all their members? When a group of very different people direct their intent and resources toward making local food affordable and accessible, differences can unite in common cause.

It would improve bioregional citizenship. Once we take a stand to eat from our bioregion, we begin to care much more about its health—about the quality of the water, soil, and air around us. We see the beautiful complexity of the interconnected living systems required to produce good food. We start organizing in creative and clarifying ways like the New Mexico Coalition for Community Rights. This group encourages thousands of regional groups to adopt Community Bills of Rights, asserting that corporations are not above people, and declaring that all citizens of a watershed have an inalienable right to clean air and clean water.

It would boost “community resilience”—the ability of your home region to thrive in the face of change and shocks from the outside, as articulated by Transition movement founder Rob Hopkins. A bioregional food covenant supported by organizations would build local capacity and infrastructure, reduce dependency upon external providers, promote sustainability, and increase biological diversity.

The 25/75/100 Bioregional Food Covenant: a practical idea that might incite a movement. What might our nation look like if a groundswell of people across the country took on this covenant and patiently worked with their farmers and sellers and communities to obtain 75% of their food from their own region by 2025?

Let’s find out together.

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Find your place on the planet.
Dig in, and take responsibility from there.
Gary Snyder