

The Local “Butterfly Effect”

By Christine Loughlin, OP

Every Tuesday afternoon we participate in a marvelous summer ritual. When the large white van backs up to the ramp of the distribution shed just prior to 3:00 o'clock, we march out to unload the waxed boxes packed full with the produce from Heirloom Harvest CSA and Community Farm. In mid-summer the contents of the waxed containers are as colorful as an artist's palette—yellow squashes and red beets, purple cabbage and orange carrots, with a wide variation of greens and whites and browns in the form of chard, leeks, potatoes and every herb under the sun.

A few weeks ago I was drawn to a conversation among five young women, the first cluster to arrive on that damp afternoon. As they bagged their vegetables delighting in the abundance, amazing questions surfaced: *Are these beets? What do you do with beets? I've never eaten beets – do you cook them or serve them raw?* The questions stunned me. Without a moment's hesitation, Clare responded. She had grown up on a farm and learned early the secrets of drawing out the best flavor every vegetable has to offer. “Beets are wonderful. You can serve them hot or warm or room temperature. Cook the beets. Just add a little olive oil and sugar, raspberry vinegar and orange juice. Even my seven year old daughter Katherine loves them—she'll eat the whole bowl!”

In the flash of that one minute conversation about beets, I contemplated the political and social movements that mark us generation by generation. The choices of these young women and their families address complex economic, political, environmental questions. On the shelf at the local supermarket, produce travels an average of 1,300 miles from agribusiness to table. I'm not sure if the concerns of fossil fuels and global warming, of world hunger and the forcing of small farmers from their lands, or of poisoned waters choked with pesticides, cross the minds of the women as they gather up their share. Yet, we all know that food defines the soul of culture as much as any prayer. In asking the question—*how do you cook a beet*—one begins to contemplate a new relationship with locally grown food. Like no generation before them, these young women attest to the fact that they acknowledge *eating is a moral act*.

The notion was written so beautifully in the newsletter that accompanied the share that week. Patricia Stefanko, the farm intern, wrote to the shareholders, “Think of yourself as a conservationist. Your support for Heirloom Harvest CSA and Community Farm promotes an ethic of care for this land that includes habitat protection for species that make this farm their home. We share this space with many creatures who, like ourselves, seek resources such as non-poisoned food and water.” She promised to tread lightly whether on foot or tractor for the balance of power lies always in her favor.

Chaos theory is the newest science. It deals with an unreal like but very real world of *strange attractors*. This science is discovering a disorderliness just beneath the surface of everything we consider orderly. On the other hand it's discovering an awesome orderliness lurking just beneath the surface of everything we consider disorderly. Wisdom seekers from many fields of science and from many spiritual traditions are “seeing and hearing” subtle patterns emerging. Under the chaos dragging our culture and western civilization down, an amazing new pattern of order is burgeoning. The new patterns seem to appear from something as simple as the flap of a butterfly wing.

This nonphysical, spiritual dimension manifests itself wherever and whenever conditions are ready. The early manifestations are as fragile as the flutter of a butterfly wing. The originating sources of breakthroughs are called strange attractors, and they become the seedbeds of

marvels to come. The primordial energy of the Universe reconstitutes itself in a gesture never before expressed. Five young women learning to support and to eat the produce of local agriculture become the strong winds that reshape and create a new economic order, one that enhances the ecology of a local place and considers the well-being of the global commons. As a species we are programmed to reflect on the reality that we experience. Out of our reflection we construct our meaning and create our cosmology. Our cosmology is our belief about the creation and purpose of the world. How we see the creation determines what we value. Our actions are our public witness to what we value. A farmer, a farm intern, five young women become the strange attractor that seeds a new human ethic of land, food, community, and our human presence with all Life.

■ CL