

“Some Responses to Outreach Done with the ‘Durham Village’ Concept “

Introduction

I have been interested in becoming involved with, an advocating for, ecologically sustainable communities for a long time. Specifically, in 1991, I put together an outreach package which included a three page description of “How Modern Agriculture-Based Villages Can Contribute to the Continuity of Peaceful Human Settlements”, a flyer describing a concept called “Durham Village”, and long letter to the editor titled “A ‘Branching’ of American Culture” which had been printed as commentary in a local newspaper. I sent this outreach package to environmental organizations, environmental magazines, peace organizations, sustainable agriculture organizations, individual organic farmers, etc. I enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope to encourage responses.

Here are excerpts from some of the responses I received:

1. Lisa Paulson (High Wind Farm, Wisconsin) (March 25, 1991)

“Thanks for sending your very thorough paper on agriculture-based villages. Certainly this is a laudable goal, if pretty idealistic for the U.S. at the moment. Once people are part of the consumer society, it’s harder to get them to give it up—but of course much of it we must if we are to survive. Even those of us who believe with all our hearts in living more gently, and have given up a great deal to try the experiment of community, have lots of blind spots, drive our cars a lot, etc....”

2. Leonard K. Cadwallader (Farm and Wilderness, Vermont) (April 1, 1991)

“Thank you for sending your monograph to me. Your advocacy of peaceful human settlements is most convincing. You must be sure and come to the Farm and Wilderness sometime this summer to see a land-based village in action. Ours happens to be youth centered, but I think the results are much the same. I would urge you to get in touch with Bruce Kantner (Derbyshire Farm, New Hampshire), if you’re not already. He has done some formative thinking on this topic and should be included in your dialog. Finally, a suggestion. It would be my observation that any individual, and, by extension, community must have a spiritual component to achieve fulfillment. I recognize your desire to separate yourself from communities that are only religious, but to envision Durham Village without a spiritual component is a serious oversight. Best wishes in your endeavors.”

3. Ernest Morgan (Celo Community, North Carolina) (April 1, 1991)

"I appreciate your letter of March 25 and enclosures related to agriculture-based villages. I actively share your concern about our society. Our culture is characterized by greed, exploitation, and rampant consumerism. The world's population is increasing by roughly 11,000 per hour. During the last few decades the world's population has more than doubled, and during the same period of time the world's arable land has diminished by half. It is vital that we learn to quiet our egos, control our numbers, and simplify our lifestyles.... Celo Community is not 'agriculture-based' but the members almost without exception related actively with the land and produce a considerable portion of their own food.... In my estimation, the way in which a community makes its living is less important than the spirit of the community...."

4. David Orr (Dept. of Environmental Studies, Oberlin College, Ohio) (April 2, 1991)

"Thank you for sending me your piece on human settlements. I think you are right to place the issue in the context of community and villages. My experience, such as it is, confirms your thoughts, I don't have much to add beyond saying that you've touched on the major issues involved and to wish you success the idea deserves."

5. Suresvaradasa (Gita-nagari Village, Pennsylvania) (April 8, 1991)

".... We live at Gita-nagari, literally 'the village where the Bhagavad-Gita is sung and lived'. The Gita, maybe you know, was Gandhi's favorite book of truth. The spiritual agrarian society in village India, which has lived by the Gita for thousands of years, provided Sir Albert Howard with raw material for his Agricultural Testament, the bible of the organic movement in the West.... Ideally, village life allows everyone to 'make it' at his calling, what he really loves to do.... Practically, this is no easy task... what is hard is agreeing on how to get from here to there, from an artificial society to a sustainable one. By culture or by agriculture? By both of course. But everyone seems to be stuck in their personal interest... 'Plain living and high thinking are no more,' lamented the poet Wordsworth. That was back in 1803. How much the madness has multiplied since then.... Hope this finds you well and look forward to hearing from you soon.... I'm glad Durham village is 'diverse enough to be offering styles of living simply rather than one religious way of living simply. In old village India, also, everyone followed their dharma, their calling...."

6. Andrew Baker (Institute for Community Economics, Massachusetts) (April 24, 1991)

"Thank you for your letter and materials on 'peaceful human settlements.' It's an admirable looking model for which I know of few prototypes. The Directory of Intentional Communities might contain some approximations. Other components of such a human-scaled, locally-controlled, owned and

produced community economy with which I'm familiar include community supported agriculture (CSA), co-housing, community land trust, and community development loan funds to name a few. I'd be happy to send you additional information on some of these approaches if they match what you're looking for...."

7. Carla Coe (Context Institute, Washington) (May 6, 1991)

"... Diane Gilman says you are already aware of her research in eco-villages. Our next issue of In Context (out in June) will be drawn from that research.... I liked your materials and feel your op-ed piece was particularly strong. You've got a good grip—it seems like to me—on what you need to do to succeed. I feel very sure you will!"

8. Holly Harman Fackler (Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, Ohio) (May 28, 1991)

"I read with great interest the materials you sent. If you find the utopia you describe, please let me know about it so I can go there too. Rural communities, of course, used to be much more like what you describe than they now are, having succumbed to a myriad of sins which the powers-that-be typically classify as progress. Please don't wait to find that utopia to begin putting hands and feet on your ideals. Voltaire's Candide, you might recall, wasn't satisfied in Eldorado. His wandering found him back home again, simply tending his garden...."

9. Leonard Peries (National rural Conference, Negombo, Sri Lanka) May 28, 1991

"Thanks for the material you sent us. My team and I are quite happy with it and would like to have your further views about the implementation of the thoughts set out. As for us we are working on a village situation, actually a seven village complex of about sixty families, poor and primitive. We have been very closely associated with them for the last four years. We have been trying very hard to relate ourselves to the people within them and we presume we have affected the beginnings of a 'Durham village' both in its content and its spirit. Sustainable Agriculture as a way of life is the thesis on which we are working as we try to engender the 'peaceful human settlement' which is your dream and ours too. Up to now we are happy with our performances in trying to help people shed their prejudices and become more discerning and relate to one another within a commonality of purpose which is gathering in slow degrees. We shall be happy to welcome you and every form of support you can offer to make our dream, which hopefully is your dream too, come true as we begin to work together and make our thoughts infectious. The groups both in the seven village complex and outside have been in a measure infected with our thinking and consequently we feel encouraged to work harder. There is much work to be done. We shall await your response or you or both. Some literature is enclosed. With many kind thoughts...."

10. Bruce Kantner (Gaia Education Outreach, New Hampshire) (June 5, 1991)

“Thanks for sending me your writings on agriculture-based villages. I’m much in tune with these ideas and would welcome a conversation. Enclosed are 3 descriptions of our GEO project. We’re presently embarking on fund-raising and staff-student recruitment. Please call or write if you want to share ideas.”

11. Martha Shaw (Artist, Massachusetts) (June 12, 1991)

“I read with great interest your paper on Durham Village, echoing many thoughts of my own over the years. I also concur with those who see a need for a spiritual base: the conscious unfolding of inner spiritual life.... Do you see (a) need to bring about communication/exchange between people involved in such basic spiritual inner practice and people involved in outer changes in community life? Do you think your talents and work might involve something of that nature? I am also enclosing a variety of other articles and leaflets relating to various aspects of community life, including articles about E.F. Schumacher Society and SHARE programs in Great Barrington, MA (I do their art work!) who work on vital issues of land and money. It is important to understand these 2 issues for our present system drains away our natural resources as well as human energy and creativity and cooperative endeavors. Perhaps if we just consider that every existing village and neighborhood is already a University—in varying degrees of health and ill health, balance and imbalance, then we are free from having to establish new boundaries and communities and set to work to create small units of change and health wherever we are and look for ways to connect with people already around us. It is not an easy task, of course, because of centuries of training in other habits of life that pull away from co-operative efforts. But there are talents and potential for renewal if we can find a way to nourish it.... if we could allow it of ourselves!.... Teachers, living close to farms and workshops and a well-rounded education in all these aspects of life. Maybe the whole infrastructure could be put in a non-profit, educational status: development of local gardens and workshops for local basic needs.... Big dreams, yes? Have to start small in whatever situation is best for one and ones particular talents. Perhaps you are good in such organizational skills and in making contact with others. I am more the artist type and not so good in organizational skills. I am trying to put some of these ideas in ‘art’ form—drawing and a few words.... Anyhow, keep me in touch with your work, if possible—and very best wishes to you in your constructive endeavors. (P.S. You might be interested in (a) most penetrating and insightful book: Why the Village Movement? by J.C. Kumarappa—who worked with Gandhi. Available from Greenleaf Books; Canton, MA)”

12. Milly Clapp (The Greens Clearinghouse, Missouri) (June 12, 1991)

“.... I am 82, and your ‘Durham Village’ is an accurate description of the rural American that I personally remember before the hi-tech ripoff. I rode in a horse-drawn buggy. I liked the funny-tasting cistern water.... I don’t remember an ice house, but the root cellar was very cold, and putting a jar of milk in the brook would keep it from souring. I remember catching a fish in the farm pond, and I remember

delicious ham and bacon coming out of the smoke house. I've heard my cousin say: 'Charlie can go sound asleep behind the walking plow. He knows the horse will make the turns o.k. I have watched the making of candles and have washed and shined the globes of coal oil lamps. Organic, biological farming is hard work, but if everyone is doing it, the jobs can be passed around. There is always something to learn, and techniques to constantly refine.... Try to find other old people to share their memories as children on farms!'

13. Ken Fladie (Sparrowhawk Community, Oklahoma) (September 5, 1991)

"I read with interest the information which you sent to our village (Sparrowhawk Village) about 'Do you live in a peaceful settlement?' Enclosed is a flyer describing our village. The members of our community are well-educated, intelligent, and independent but committed to making community work. This means there is compromising. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to get groups of people to totally agree on anything. We have a number of committees in our village.... I'm the agriculture committee chairman. I am pretty much philosophically in tune with your philosophy.... I think that I know what you are looking for. I personally invite you to visit our village. It will not be exactly what you want, but, I believe that you'll find it difficult to find exactly what you want. Over the years, I've spoken to a number of individuals. Many want it here and now. The bottom line is that each individual must decide what he/she really wants. Make a commitment to it. Create a vision and go and make it a reality. It takes persistence and work no matter where you go. It won't just happen. The place to do this does not have to be perfect, but the surroundings must be conducive to the vision.... I hope that this letter is helpful. I look forward to hearing from you."

14. Maynard Kaufman (School of Homesteading, Michigan) (June 6, 1992)

"When I received your letter of June 4, I remembered your name because of the paper you sent—maybe a year ago. I liked it, but was too busy then to respond. Now, I like your program of promoting agriculture-based villages. We would love to visit with you. Why don't you make a tour this summer, stopping at various places that respond to your letter? You are certainly welcome to live and eat and work with us for a few days or a week. Right now we have 3 apprentices.... We have been doing this sort of thing for about 20 years.... The big problem is how to promote the cause of 'agriculture-based villages' or homesteading.... Locally we are working on a LETS (Local Exchange and Trading System) as a way to get people to imagine more self-reliant activity. Let me know if this interests you."

15. Kirkpatrick Sale (Writer, New York) (June 16, 1992)

"Yes, indeed we are working along similar lines—but it's tough work, and not much of it paid, as you know, and the rewards are in the heart.... I'm not sure how to help you on homesteading. My two thoughts are the School of Living, PA—and the Federation of Intentional Communities. Or perhaps the

E.F. Schumacher Society.... And you should know the book "Territory and Function" by John Friedmann and Clyde Weaver, which I wrote about in "Dwellers in the Land"—which you should also know... Good luck—you're on the right path."

16. Jd Belanger (Countryside Magazine, Wisconsin) (June 30, 1992)

".... Ag-based villages: They've been mentioned in Countryside. But only by dreamers. In the 23 years I've been sitting in this chair, I don't recall ever hearing about one that got off the drawing board, much less became a viable enterprise..... Most of our readers seem to be pretty independent, family-oriented people, with little interest in cooperatives of any kind.... Sorry I can't be of more help. Good luck in your quest."