

Chile Man.” He owns a ten-acre sustainable farm in Virginia, and here he shares his story with us as he also wrote it for American Farmland Trust Magazine. “I’d always had a relationship with the land, hiking through the Appalachians and the Rockies, and I’d grown up with my hands in the dirt. But faced with the prospect of endless days in windowless cubicles, I decided to live a dream I’d had since adolescence, and start my own sustainable farm.”

He continues, “As soon as we closed on the farm (July 1998), in Loudoun County, Virginia, I quit my job as a marketing manager in the computer industry and The Chile Man was born.”

He now grows 67 varieties of peppers and other fruits and vegetables to produce more than 40,000 bottles of all-natural marinades, barbecue sauces, mustards and salsas right on his ten-acre farm.

The term I use for this book, “micro eco-farm,” sprung from this change in farmers. From urban lots to small town backyards to rural small acreage, this term is the umbrella for highly abundant, constantly improving, ecologically operated micro-farms that produce a mix of fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, nuts, mushrooms, flowers, fibers, craft materials, organic, pasture-fed dairy products, farm-crafted creations, and farming education and experiences.

The examples in this book emphasize farms from fractions of an acre to five acres that earn fulltime income for at least one adult. Some provide the entire income for single adults with several children, and some provide the main income for two adults and their families.

It also touches on microfarms that integrate with complementary home and cottage businesses, those that prosper on six to 15 acres, and a few who earn a supplemental income.

All are sustainable in a variety of ways and are taking traditional organic production to new levels. Whether they reintroduce ancient royal gardening techniques or are the first to profit from the latest U.S. research, they connect sustainable local mini-farming with the care of ecosystems and entire world populations.

Some even say it’s as though they are recreating an advanced form of Eden. They are willing to work harder short-term, in order to have more time long-term for further creativity and loving their friends, neighbors and family.

This seems to be just what the earth wanted, anyway: A co-creation of human innovation combined with the earth’s superior ability to “do the hard work.” Even organic pest spraying, rototilling and weeding will become less and less necessary at the hands of these farmers.

Fueling this new entity—the micro eco-farm—are several supporting changes in human values. These include the environmental and health movement, the delicious “Slow Food Movement” (see Resources and Networking), the push to strengthen local economies and the parents wanting their kids to connect to nature and their food source again.

We now know that large amounts of farm crops can be produced intensively on very small amounts of land very easily and very simply, and as this happens, the land and crops get more abundant year after year.

There are many techniques that allow for this, and yet, micro eco-farmers don’t always use just one of them. Often, they will synergize several, to create a new whole much more prolific than the sum of its parts.

Micro eco-farmers do not compete with mass-produced, under-priced products. As one would guess, they supply the niche markets. However, you will soon see that there are more niches than anyone ever dreamed of. These “tons of niches” collectively add up to a very large opportunity for new micro eco-farmers, almost making non-niche farms seem like the oddball.

These micro eco-farms, along with their larger sustainable agriculture cousins and sustainable home gardeners, choose the rhythm of a new drummer—that of the earth as the solution, rather than the earth as the problem. They still touch the soil; they still plant the seeds; and they still nurture the animals.

But, because of the retrieval of their power, they have switched direction, crossing the bridge back home, rather than crossing the bridge far away. No longer running from the earth as one would run from an enemy, forcing and succumbing, they are now moving towards the earth as a source of latent and untapped wisdom.

Whenever they need an answer, the answer seems to appear — such as it did concerning the honeybee problem that began in the late 20th century. Honeybee populations were dwindling. The bees could not, it seemed, sustain their health and numbers, succumbing to parasites and other invasions.

About this time, Adaline Harms had secured her five and a half acres on the edge of Mt. Shasta, in California. Here,

she now gardens in her greenhouse and hexagon-shaped raised beds.

Adaline is one of the most spiritual and earth-loving people I have ever met. My conversations with her remind me that whatever created this earth speaks to us in many ways, including directly through the earth itself, even through its own honeybees, if need be...

“I took a trip to Arizona, and while driving on Highway 5 the length of California,” she said, “I kept seeing all the bee hives on the side of the road. I just got this feeling that I needed to keep bees. I knew absolutely nothing about beekeeping, so when I got home, I started asking around about beekeepers to learn from.”

This eventually led her to someone who had worked with Ron Breland, who has a nursery and bee sanctuary in New York State and who had developed an alternative hive.

Ron reportedly noticed that in nature, bees don’t build hives in the shape of file cabinets. So Ron mimicked nature’s design in his hives, and his bees thrived well.

