

Organizations

Regenerative farmers spend little on inputs and are quite self-sufficient. This means there is far less money flowing from them into the pockets of large corporations that fund research, think tanks, and lobbyists. But there are organizations like The Land Institute, which I wrote about in Chapter 3, which work to educate, fight for, and convene regenerative farmers. They are often small but mighty. The ones mentioned below took time out of their tall task of facing the monster with love and hope to help me imagine the world they are fighting for.

Rodale Institute (Kutztown, Pennsylvania)

J.I. Rodale, who started the Rodale publishing business, was against the shift to chemicals in agriculture, not because of some land ethic or missed connection with nature, but because of his own health. He didn't want to consume food produced by chemicals that were also used in war. He was influenced by the work of Sir Albert Howard, an English botanist, and a trip to India where he saw traditional and indigenous farming practices firsthand. The *New York Times Magazine* called J.I. "the guru of the organic food cult." (He referred to himself as "Mr. Organic.")

J.I.'s son Robert followed in his dad's footsteps and could have been dubbed "Mr. Regenerative," since he was one of the first to use the term. "I prefer the idea of a regenerative agriculture," Robert said in a 1989 interview archived with the USDA. "I don't think the average person wants to live in a sustained environment. They want to live in something that's expanding and growing better."

Still, it was the term "organic" that took hold. J.I. started the nonprofit research center that supports and promotes organic agriculture that is now known as the Rodale Institute in 1947 before Robert expanded it onto a 333-acre farm in 1970.

In 1981, the Rodale Institute launched the Farming Systems Trial. They planted separate systems of grain near Kutztown, Pennsylvania, to see which worked best: organic or conventional. The ongoing trial, the longest of its kind, has shown that organic farms could earn three to six times more profit than conventional farms, produce yields up to 40 percent higher during droughts, use 45 percent less energy, and release 40 percent less carbon. Through the years, the yields of an organic system have been comparable to conventional.

Rodale's research has played an important role in taking organic from the hippie fringes and nudging it toward the mainstream while educating farmers and consumers.

Now Rodale has joined an effort to take agriculture beyond organic, combining the ideas of both J.I. and Robert to pursue regenerative organic agriculture as part of the Regenerative Organic Alliance.

To learn more about the Rodale Institute's work, volunteer and educational opportunities visit rodaleinstitute.org.

The Berry Center (New Castle, Kentucky)

I'm pretty sure every truth I've stumbled upon in this book has been written about more efficiently and eloquently by Wendell Berry. Berry, a poet, novelist, farmer, and cultural critic, followed his academic career to California, Europe, and New York before he decided to move home to Henry County, Kentucky. He recounted making the decision:

"I knew I had not escaped Kentucky, and had never really wanted to. I was still writing about it, and had recognized that I would probably need to write about it for the rest of my life. Kentucky was my fate—not an altogether pleasant fate, though it had much that was pleasing in it, but one that I could not leave behind simply by going to another place . . . Perhaps even more important, I still had a deep love for the place I had been born in."

I feel the same way about rural Indiana, and I often turn to Berry to help me make sense of my place.

When I learned of the Berry Center, I knew I had to visit. I met Wendell's daughter Mary, the center's director, and his granddaughter, Virginia Berry Aguilar, who runs the bookstore. Virginia and her husband were looking for land to start their own homestead, but people from the city were driving up prices, making it even more difficult to earn a living farming there.

The Berry Center is concerned with issues exactly like this, which keep small farmers from connecting to the land and community. In response, they've started Our Home Place Meat, a cooperative that unites area farmers raising grass-fed beef. They host events that "bring the humanities to rural communities," and they've even partnered with Sterling College in Vermont to offer a free undergraduate degree in sustainable farming to a select few students who study and farm in Henry County, Kentucky, where their liberal arts farming

studies are balanced with work on a midscale livestock farm.

Perhaps more than anyone I've come across, Wendell Berry writes about agriculture as a global and local problem with a billion beautiful local solutions. He sees the right kind of agriculture as a partnership of people supporting one another as they work with nature to feed their communities both spiritually and calorically. It's less about prescribing farming practices, but an issue of character, soul, and intention, a feeling that guides farmers and communities to sustain a future for themselves and future generations. Berry's work is an inspiration to many in the regenerative agriculture movement and its supporters.

Wendell Berry and the Berry Center show us what regenerative agriculture feels like and give us reasons why a paradigm shift in agriculture is necessary.

To learn more visit berrycenter.org, and if you'd like a good introduction to Berry's writing, which feels timeless to me, I recommend *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*.

Breadfruit Institute (Kauai, Hawaii)

Like kalo, breadfruit was one of the original "canoe crops" Pacific Islanders brought to the Hawaiian Islands to build and sustain a thriving population. However, as the changing climate threatens regions where breadfruit is grown, as Pacific Islanders have been forced off their land and away from their traditional diets, and as food comes more from barges than Hawaiian soils, breadfruit faces extinction.

I visited The Breadfruit Institute located in The National Tropical Botanical Garden, about twenty miles from Kaina's kalo farm. Its collection of breadfruit sits in a valley carpeted with lush green grass and tall trees where scenes from *Jurassic Park* were shot.

Director Emeritus Diane Ragone, who's sort of the Johnny Appleseed of breadfruit, has traveled all over the Pacific and tropics meeting with farmers to learn about the fruit and promote its propagation.

Breadfruit was an important part of traditional agroforestry systems, used to make canoes, medicine, cloth, and even chewing gum. Every part of the tree can be used. Living trees create a canopy providing shade for native plants and other crops. For two thousand years, breadfruit trees have protected the steep volcanic mountain slopes of Pacific Islands from erosion. Of course, the grapefruit-size fruit itself—which is starchy and smells and even tastes a bit like bread when cooked—provides essential nutrition. A mature tree can yield 200 to 300 pounds of breadfruit a year.

The hope is that communities across the tropics can connect or reconnect with breadfruit and include it in diverse regenerative agroforestry systems, allowing them to be more self-sufficient and food secure. "It's so important for humanity to have sustainable food crops ... that are suitable for their growing conditions," Dr. Ragone said in an interview with CNN.

If we are going to diversify our diets away from global commodities, we need to follow the leads of champions like Dr. Ragone and places like the Breadfruit Institute.

Patagonia, the publisher of this book and supporter of my global adventure, has supported The Breadfruit Institute and has even included Regenerative Organic Certified breadfruit in crackers sold under the Patagonia Provisions brand.

To learn more visit <https://ntbg.org/breadfruit/> and read this [CS Monitor article on breadfruit](#) and Dr. Ragone.

Certifications

Before there was the official USDA Organic certification, there were multiple organic certifications across the country. In 1990 they merged under the USDA. Since then, however, many in the movement have felt the standards have slipped, and "organic" no longer means what it was originally intended to, and that the term had been co-opted by large agribusiness companies, which have done what they do best: industrialized, commoditized, and centralized.

This has led to new, stricter certifications that go beyond the organic standards offered by various groups. Many of these groups still see value in the USDA certification as a baseline, but one that needs to be elevated or exceeded. There could be a whole book dedicated to food labels, with hundreds of certifications a growing number of which espouse regenerative practices. I'm only writing about two here: Regenerative Organic Certified and The Real Organic Project. To explore others, I recommend starting with this guide compiled by FoodPrint: foodprint.org/eating-sustainably/food-label-guide.

Regenerative Organic Alliance

The Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA) has accepted the challenge of defining regenerative agriculture. The nonprofit, which Rodale and Patagonia (the publisher of this book) were a driving force behind, has established a certification program involving very specific requirements for how people, the environment, and animals are treated. This involves a checklist of practices in three tiers: soil health, animal welfare, and farmer and worker fairness. To earn the ROA's Regenerative Organic Certification, a farm needs to meet eighty-eight basic requirements.

ROA's mission is to "heal a broken system, repair a damaged planet, and empower farmers and eaters to create a better future through better farming. By adopting regenerative organic practices on more farms around the world, we can create long-term solutions to some of the biggest issues of our time, including the climate crisis, factory farming, and fractured rural economies."

ROA acknowledges and accepts that we live in a world where people shop in large grocery stores or online and eat and wear products that aren't accessible year-round. People live in cities and may not have an opportunity to know farmers, but still want to support agriculture practices that aren't industrial. That's where certifications come in.

Since its establishment in 2018, ROA has certified 375 different crops on nearly six million acres from 50,000+ small farmers in ninety-five countries.

Learn more at regenorganic.org.

The Real Organic Project

While many of the "beyond organic" labels hide their disdain for what has become of the USDA Organic Certification, the Real Organic Project takes it head on. They admit they've lost faith in the USDA because many of the members of Real Organic—farmers like Francis Thicke—were deeply involved in developing the original criteria and saw them erode. They've even sued the USDA as they try to prevent further diminishment and co-optation of "organic" by Big Ag.

Real Organic offers an add-on label available free to farmers. The organization won't certify eggs from chickens that have never been outside or milk from cows not on pasture. The certification was first offered in 2019 in response to the USDA certifying hydroponic vegetables—veggies grown not in soil but in a solution of water and nutrients—as organic. The group, made up of 1,100 farmers, believes a core tenet of organic agriculture is to "feed the soil," not the plant.

Learn more at realorganicproject.org. I also recommend checking out their archive of podcast episodes featuring leaders of the organic and regenerative movements realorganicproject.org/get-educated/podcasts.

Recommended Organizations

[American Farmland Trust](#)
[Artisan Grain Collaborative](#)
[Fibershed](#)
[Green America](#)
[Holistic Management International](#)
[Kiss the Ground](#)
[Land Stewardship Project](#)
[Quivira Coalition](#)
[Regeneration International](#)
[Regenerative Agriculture Foundation](#)
[Soil Health Institute](#)
[The Carbon Underground](#)
[The Land Institute](#)
[The Nature Conservancy](#)
[The Rodale Institute](#)
[The Savory Institute](#)

Movies, books, and podcasts that influenced this project:

Movies

Common Ground
Dreaming of a Vetter World
Gather
Kiss the Ground
One Hundred Thousand Beating Hearts
Poisoning Paradise
The Biggest Little Farm
The Need to Grow
To Which We Belong

Books

A Bold Return to Giving a Damn: One Farm, Six Generations, and the Future of Food by Will Harris
A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet by Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore
The Blue Plate: A Food Lover's Guide to Climate Chaos by Mark Easter
Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer
Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture, A New Earth by Charles Massy
Dawn Again: Tracking the Wisdom of the Wild by Doniga Markegard
Dirt to Soil: One Family's Journey into Regenerative Agriculture by Gabe Brown
Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations by David Montgomery
Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming by Paul Hawken
Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter by Ben Goldfarb
Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out? by Bill McKibben
Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land by Leah Penniman
Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life by George Monbiot
Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life by David Montgomery
Healing Grounds: Climate, Justice, and the Deep Roots of Regenerative Farming by Liz Carlisle
Holistic Management, Third Edition: A Commonsense Revolution to Restore Our Environment by Allan Savory and Jody Butterfield
In the Shadow of Green Man: My Journey from Poverty and Hunger to Food Security and Hope by Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin
Ishmael: A Novel by Daniel Quinn
Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America by Liz Carlisle
Nature as Measure: The Selected Essays of Wes Jackson by Wes Jackson
One Size Fits None: A Farm Girl's Search for the Promise of Regenerative Agriculture by Stephanie Anderson
The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance by Robin Wall Kimmerer
Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler
Restoration Agriculture: Real-World Permaculture for Farmers by Mark Shepard
Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore by Elizabeth Rush
Savage Gods by Paul Kingsnorth
Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor by Rob Nixon
Sweet in Tooth and Claw: Stories of Generosity and Cooperation in the Natural World by Kristin Ohlson
The Fate of Food: What We'll Eat in a Bigger, Hotter, Smarter World by Amanda Little
The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World by Peter Wohlleben
The Need to Be Whole: Patriotism and the History of Prejudice by Wendell Berry
The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals by Michael Pollan
The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming by Masanobu Fukuoka
The Overstory: A Novel by Richard Powers
The River Why by David James Duncan

The Soil Will Save Us: How Scientists, Farmers, and Foodies Are Healing the Soil to Save the Planet by Kristin Ohlson
The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World by David Abraham
The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture by Wendell Berry
The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics by Vandana Shiva
We Are Each Other's Harvest: Celebrating African American Farmers, Land, and Legacy by Natalie Baszile
We are the Weather by Jonathan Safran Foer
World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Podcasts

[Accidental Gods](#)
[Down to Earth: The Planet to Plate Podcast](#)
[For the Wild](#)
[How to Save a Planet](#)
[How We Survive](#)
[Kiss the Ground with Ryland Engelhart](#)
[Real Organic Podcast](#)
[Regeneration International](#)
[The EcoCiv Podcast](#)
[The Regenerative Agriculture Podcast by John Kempf](#)
[The Regenerative Journey with Charlie Arnott](#)
[Rooted in Organic Podcast](#)
[The Sustainability Agenda](#)
[The Sustainable Dish Podcast with Diana Rodgers](#)
[What If We Get It Right with Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#)

Learn more about the farmers and others featured in the book

Mark Shepard / New Forest Farm: newforestfarm.us
A-Frame Farm : lukepetersonfarms.com
The Land Institute: landinstitute.org
Maasai Center for Pastoralism: maasaiactionfordevelopment.org
Enonkishu Conservancy: enonkishu.org
De Mendes Chocolate: demendes.com.br/?lang=en
ReNature: renature.co
Amabela: ekosfera.org.br/en/
The Health and Happiness Project: saudeealegria.org.br/en/projeto-saude-alegria-2
Raquel Tupinamba: instagram.com/raqueltupynamba/?hl=en
Gary Hooser: garyhooser.com
Kumano I Ke Ala Farm: kumanoikeala.org
Will Harris / White Oak Pastures: whiteoakpastures.com
Howard Allen / Faithfull Farms: facebook.com/faithfullfarmsnc
Meadowlark Organics / Wepking Family: meadowlarkorganics.com
Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin / Tree-Range Farms: treerangefarms.com
Huerto Cuatro Estaciones: huertocuatroestaciones.cl
Sequatchie Cove Farm: sequatchiecovefarm.com
Markegard Family Grass-Fed: markegardfamily.com
Radiance Dairy: facebook.com/radiancedairy
Janie's Mill: janiesmill.com
Perennial Pantry: perennial-pantry.com/
Jason Mauck: x.com/jasonmauck1
Grain Place Foods: grainplacefoundation.org
Kelsey Timmerman: kelseytimmerman.com