

MASSING LINKS

JUDITH WEINRAUB SPEAKS WITH ENVIRONMENTALIST AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST PAUL HAWKEN ABOUT OFFTRACK FOOD PRACTICES AND POLICIES AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REVERSE THEM.

If you're part of the world of foodservice in America, whether in a restaurant, in a school cafeteria, or at catered private parties, worries about how food fits into the global present and future may not be the first thing on your mind. But for many people, they are, especially in the context of current rising costs worldwide (see "The Price Is Fright," page 75).

Maybe you're one of those people and have decided to go organic or insist on recycling or pass along your used frying oils to be turned into biofuels. Paul Hawken recognizes those impulses well. A West Coast environmentalist, social activist, entrepreneur (he cofounded Smith & Hawken, the garden supply company), and influential author, he'd tell you that you are in fact part of an international movement—maybe the largest in the world. It's a movement that could be likened to spontaneous combustion, made up of individuals, community groups, organizations, governments, and NGOs concerned with environmental protection and social justice.

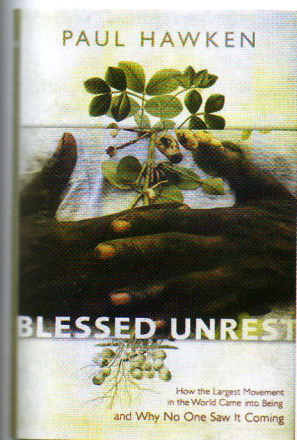
As the subtitle of Hawken's newest book, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming* indicates, the

world was blindsided by this movement. That's probably because what he describes has no formal unity, no leader, no hierarchy of relationships, no banner headlines. Hawken estimates the number of adherents in this movement in the hundreds of thousands, with interests as wide-ranging as biodiversity, sustainable development, human rights, water and land conservation, social justice, indigenous peoples, the oceans, and socially responsible investing—all with their own constituencies, though some do overlap.

Today this community comprises disparate groups, both grassroots and international. If anything unites them, says Hawken, it's a shared body of thought that coheres into a value system and the desire for a reversal of what he calls "centuries of frenzied self-destructive behavior."

Touching on history, natural science, economics, and current events, the book reflects Hawken's positive outlook, his belief in the resilience of human nature, and his admiration for the nonprofits and community organizations dedicated to the betterment of the earth. They may be diverse and at first glance unrelated, he says, but their energies and actions have become forces for change that can't be ignored. Taken all together, they have become a powerful movement.

To help interested readers understand the breadth of the movement and locate groups and activities suited to their own, particular concerns, *Blessed Unrest* comes with a useful, 100 page appendix. Generated by the book's partner Web site, Wisser Earth (www.wisserearth.org), the appendix provides an online database and directory of environmental and social justice organizations that can be edit-



ed by the communities it serves. (WISER stands for World Index of Social and Environmental Responsibility.) At the time of its publication, in May 2007, Hawken counted groups from 243 countries, territories, and sovereign islands.

Organized by category and subcategory, the appendix highlights environmental and social issues. The subcategories narrow down specific subjects and list the number of organizations listed at WiserEarth.org at the time the book was written.

The Food and Nourishment umbrella, for example, is subclassified into Food Aid (239 organizations named), Food Literacy (167), Food Supply (1,671), Global Food Supply and Sustainability (68), Hunger and Food Security (1,992), Local Food Systems (446), and Malnutrition, Diet, and Education (853).

Many of these subjects were discussed when Congress considered this year's farm bill. Advocates who favored legislation that might help solve some of the problems in the American food system were often frustrated, but their proponents—part of the movement, whether they know it or not—have vowed to continue their efforts.

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Food Arts asked Hawken to consider the current state of the food system.

Food Arts: *What are the pressing issues in agriculture and the food system?*

Paul Hawken: The entire food system is part of a larger ecological system, and each aspect needs our full attention. So, in no particular order:

- What we have today is a fossil food system. Its productivity and abundance are due to artificial fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanization. Fertilizers are created primarily by natural gas, and mechanization is powered by gasoline and diesel. As fossil fuels go up in price or decline in availability, the price of food goes up and the rate of increase in food production declines.

- World population is increasing at the rate of 74 million people per year and will level off in approximately 50 years at about 9 billion or so. Feeding the new arrivals will require higher inputs of fossil fuels because the most productive lands are already cultivated.

- In the past decades, the world has turned away from small holdings and family farms to industrial farming, not because big farms are more productive, necessarily, but because they are more profitable. This method of agriculture treats the soil as an inert medium to which you apply chemical inputs: one group of compounds to make things grow, one group to kill competing weeds and insects.

- Additionally, plowing, tilling, and artificial fertilizers kill microorganisms in the soil (that are the true source of fertility), which in turn causes the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

FA: *What are the implications if these issues are not addressed?*

PH: Agriculture is the single largest contributor to global heating; not cars, not airplanes, not electrical utilities. We are at a threshold of knowledge and urgency that requires us to reduce our greenhouse gases dramatically, particularly carbon dioxide.

FA: *What needs to be championed and nurtured?*

PH: Agriculture will need to do several things in the coming years: feed more people; reduce the amount of carbon based-inputs employed; institute biological farming techniques in order to restore humus, sequester carbon, and improve productivity in the soil; and restore the nutritive quality of food.

I'm not saying you have to be a vegetarian, but we need to decrease the population of the 3.5 billion farm animals we eat and milk for the health of the planet.

If we don't do these things, we'll see food shortages, punishing food prices that will inflict further and grave poverty on those who already suffer, and increasing contributions to global heating.

FA: *So much of the activity in the movement you describe has taken place within small groups. How does that work with the food supply?*

PH: If you think about it, land itself is small.

We don't understand the stunning diversity that lies beneath our feet or how it functions. Soil consists of millions of organisms in every square centimeter—organisms that are different in each field, that vary in makeup and genetics. Our agricultural heritage is a gift of smallness, of people knowing and caring for the land they could walk every day.

The organizations throughout the world that support restorative agriculture are also small, with the exception of the Slow Food organization. But there are many thousands of these organizations, and in that way they mimic what they are trying to preserve, which is topsoil foremost and the methods of retaining it. We lose 24 billion tons a year in topsoil every year, close to 2 percent.

FA: *Who are the heroes, the people with the courage, fortitude, or imagination to work for positive change in the food system?*

PH: There are so many heroes, but we hear the same names every time, and I hesitate to give people the impression that there are only a handful of famous activists driving this movement toward restorative agriculture. I will tell you about a hero who is not with us anymore, Ted Whitmer. In 1966, Ted farmed winter wheat out of Bloomfield, Montana—land that is just as flat and formless as you could imagine. He had started growing organic wheat after World War II and doggedly did everything he could to improve his land. He picked up every elk antler and bone he saw and would throw it in the back of

his truck and grind it up later along with bones he got from the slaughterhouses. The bone meal would go onto his land, along with just about anything else that was rich in minerals. Over the decades, his wheat became remarkable. It was hard, small, and glutinous, not demineralized and poor tasting like today's, and it made the best whole wheat bread you've ever tasted. The difference in flavor was obvious. The difference in nutritional quality is measurable.

There are tens of thousands of farmers in the world who will not compromise and who understand that they are a biological bulwark to the further degradation of the land and human health. These are the real heroes.

FA: *Are there any positive efforts that should be particularly commended?*

PH: I believe that the Roots of Change movement in California is a critical initiative. Led by growers, chefs, health advocates, and activists, it has as its goal to convert all of California agriculture to sustainable farming in one generation.

FA: *What do you see as the problems of the future? What needs to be reversed at this point or very soon? How much time do we have?*

PH: One of the drivers of the food system is the loss of nutritional literacy. We cannot taste the things we once did and do not recognize the importance of taste. And since taste drives consumption and purchasing, it's critical to what we grow and how we produce our food. Our nutritional literacy can be reduced to a few intense flavors: salty, sweet, fat. Yum. It's called McDonald's and Fritos and Cocoa Puffs. Manufacturers know far more than we do about what happens in our mouths, about olfactory responses and mouthfeel and how these affect the brain and our sense of well-being. These taste buds in our mouth are not baubles to be toyed with. They are evolution itself, a teacher, a kindness, a guide. Because the natural food stores have been taken over by Whole Foods, it's left to restaurants to curate the wisdom of our taste buds and remind us of what we have lost.

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Judith Weinraub is a W. K. Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellow, 2007–2008, and a 25 year veteran of the *Washington Post*, where she spent the last 10 years as a reporter in its Food Section.

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