

Globalization, Globalism, and Sustainable Agriculture  
Presentation to the College of Agriculture  
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I am honored and delighted to be invited to speak with you this evening. I have been following, with keen interest, the transformation of your college over the last year and have been inspired by your efforts and accomplishments to push for a similar process in the College of Agriculture back at the University of Minnesota, where I sit on the Board of Directors of the Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. I have taken many of the insights and lessons of your efforts, especially your ideas about how to use the basic concepts of sustainability to lead the creation of a New Economy for your region.

Thank you for your inspiration and leadership -it is being felt and will continue to be felt around the planet.

It was precisely because of my strong belief in the importance of your success here at UBC -- for the entire planet-- that I suggested to Dean Quayle the topic of my presentation --Globalization, Globalism, and Sustainable Agriculture. I believe that Globalism -- the idea of cooperation and respect among individuals, groups, and governments at the international level -- is absolutely vital to sustainability at all levels, from the household to the planet. I will argue tonight that it is vital to build into all of your work major elements of international collaboration, staff and information exchanges with other institutions around the planet, and other joint ventures tackling global problems.

At the same time, I believe that globalization, or de-regulated economic competition at the planetary level, is the single greatest threat to planetary sustainability. Globalization is creating a level of social, ecological, and economic crisis beyond the ability of most individuals, communities, and governments to survive. Perhaps more devastating, globalization is creating political and social tensions, like forced migration and competition for scarce water and land resources, making it impossible to forge the level of cooperation and collaboration needed to tackle the serious global challenges we face.

Your excellent work here at UBC, upon which I, and many others around the planet are relying, could be carried along on a tide of global cooperation that amplifies your impact a thousand-fold -- the multiplier effect of globalism.

Or there is another possibility, and this is my fear given a number of recent events, that despite your excellent mission statement and energetic implementation of you strategic plans your efforts will be severely undermined or even destroyed by the powerful economic and political forces of globalization. In the short time I have with you this evening I want to suggest some ways to

use the powerful and positive energy of globalism to combat the powerful destructiveness of globalization.

In the 1970s I lived and worked in Northern California creating a large network of food cooperatives, including farms, warehouses, manufacturing facilities such as bakeries and retail outlets. In 1975, we set-up a chicken farm to produce organic eggs for this People's Food System as this network came to be called. The small group who worked on this farm had it in our hearts to do all the right things. The chickens were on the ground, not in cages, their medicines were natural, the feed was organic, their water was without chlorine, and there were a lot of roosters running around eating this expensive feed and not producing too many eggs.

In the marketplace we were able to survive by pricing these eggs just a little bit above the commercial egg price. Consumers then, as now, are more than happy to pay a 10-20% premium for specific items that they have a reason to believe are better – be it a name brand they have heard advertised or an organic product they believe is helping to protect the environment or their children.

However, about once every six months there would be a huge influx of eggs from outside of the United States, mostly broken eggs used in manufacturing and baking. This flood of imports would drive down the price of commercial eggs, creating a large price gap between our organic, fertile eggs and the others offered in the stores. While some consumers continued to buy our clearly superior eggs, other folks opted for the cheaper ones. The price spread became too great.

After three cycles of this we abandoned the farm. The lesson that I learned from this experience is that even if you have it in your heart to farm sustainably there are external forces that can make this impossible, has guided my work life ever since. It became clear to me that we needed to do whatever we could to create a market that would reward, instead of punish, farmers who were trying to “do the right thing”. This took me into the policy arena, where I have been working ever since, trying to make sure that the policies at all levels of government – local, provincial, national and international, support and encourage sustainable farming, forestry, and fishing. Part of my work life has been in government, part in the business sector, and for the last 10 years I have been working in a private, non-profit research and advocacy organization dedicated to using the global exchange of ideas and information to accelerate the trend towards sustainable development in rural communities and regions. Often when asked to explain the work of our Institute I say that we import and export ideas that promote sustainable communities.

At the same time, and much to my dismay as I look back on it, I have ended up spending nearly as much time fighting against bad governmental or corporate policies – including a wide range of subsidies, regulations, taxes, monopoly practices, and other governmental mechanisms that were either actively promoting unsustainable agriculture or getting in the way of farmers or food processors who wanted to do the right thing.

It is precisely my work over the last 25 years, since I abandoned the chicken farm, that has led me to the conclusions that underlie my talk this evening.

First, that the only path towards sustainability is one that is guided and informed from a global perspective, like the cosmonaut and astronauts get from looking back on Earth from their extraterrestrial orbits. We are inter-connected within a planetary ecosystem and therefore our solutions must reflex this global context.

And second, that the greatest threat to planetary sustainability is unregulated global competition. The barriers created by economic globalization to the implementation of basic sustainable development policies – such as ecological accounting, political subsidiarity, fair trade, full-cost pricing, life-cycle analysis, and adaptive systems management – threaten life on the planet and must therefore be overcome.

### Searching for Sustainability in All the Right Places

Whenever I speak about the need for a global approach to sustainability I am inevitably challenged by someone arguing that we need to primarily focus on local and regional place-based approaches to sustainability. I couldn't agree more. Eco-system specific solutions that reflect the social, cultural, political, civic, and economic realities of the area are the only hope for lasting solutions.

This being said, my personal experience is that there are at least three key reasons that our work must be imbedded into a global process if we hope for truly sustainable solutions. First, we are all interconnected. If the solution to an ecological crisis is moving the problem to somebody else's backyard or watershed then it will come back to haunt us in numerous small and large ways.

Second, the homogenization and standardization that accompanies economic globalization process has created similar threats and challenges in many parts of the planet, giving rise to a number of different approaches. Local communities or regions now find that they can get valuable ideas and inspiration from other individuals and communities from other parts of the planet that can help in the design and implementation to a similar or related problem.

Third, and increasingly important, the only way to tackle many of the problems facing local communities is by doing so at the global policymaking levels, which means finding the mechanisms and modalities for cooperation on both solution development and successful advocacy across boundaries, borders, and cultures.

Let me give you a couple quick examples.

The marketing of the chemical, energy, and machinery intensive style of industrial agriculture that we practice in North America, Europe and in some regions of the South has been disastrous for water quality. There are lots of

arguments over whether this system is needed or not to feed the world, but almost no one argues that the system has degraded water quality and quantify in almost all circumstances. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Netherlands, where the water table is right below the surface of the land. As a result of the severity of the problem there, the government stepped in with extremely tough regulations on nutrient and pesticide applications. Unfortunately, they only handed out rule books and regulations, no solutions were offered as to how farmers were to go on farming in ways consistent with the new rules.

Luckily there was a non-profit in Holland, the Center for Agriculture and the Environment, which responded by working with farmers to develop simple, effective on-farm tools to help farmers meet their new obligations without going broke. These tools which are often called yardsticks, are now part of national farm policy in the Netherlands.

In the US, our water quality issues are a bit more dispersed, but none the less serious. In one specific situation, New York City found itself under attack from federal environmental and health authorities about alarming degradation of the water quality. New York is the last major city in the US that gets much of its drinking water from unfiltered water collected in adjacent watersheds – getting about 90% of their water from the run-off from the mountainous region called the Catskills just north of the city.

There were around 500 farmers still in this region, the remnant of a much larger farming community that had been largely destroyed when the water supply system for New York City had been set up a hundred years ago. The City's leaders decided that their approach to protecting the water would be to simply buy out the remaining 500 farmers and move them off the land. As they started down this road they did not anticipate the power and strength of the resistance they would face. After a bitter battle, the city water officials and the farmers came to an agreement. They both recognized that the water would be better if farmers stayed on their land, as opposed to suburban development, and that farmers needed to change their farming practices to ensure maximum protection of the water.

It all sounded good, but how to do this? It turns out that they needed some on-farm tools to help farmers do the right thing. We got a call one day from the head of the farmers organization who had heard that our organization worked with farmers in the Netherlands on these ideas. They invited me out to work with them on how we might adapt some of the Dutch on-farm pollution prevention yardstick tools to help them achieve their objectives. This has led to a number of tests and pilot projects and to interest from others facing similar problems, like the Chesapeake Bay, to seek out the same assistance. Farmers from the Catskills have gone to the Netherlands and scientists from the Center for Agriculture and the Environment in the Netherlands have come over to work with the folks in the Catskills.

Another example is a little closer to you here in Vancouver, where you were gracious enough to host the recent APEC summit. Not an easy task I would

imagine, given how controversial the whole APEC process is. In any case, it was at the APEC meeting held in Manila last year that non-governmental groups first met to discuss a newly proposed international treaty called the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (or MAI), now under discussion at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, based in Paris. The OECD is an association of the rich countries serving as a think-tank on cutting-edge issues and a venue for negotiations that rich countries only want to have among themselves.

The proposed MAI has been sharply criticized by a wide range of institutions and groups because they believe it would have very serious negative economic, environmental, and social consequences, including severely limiting the ability of governments to regulate investment and other issues with immense environmental implications. For example, the Association of the Governors of the western region in the United States, no bastion of wild-eyed environmentalism I can assure you, came out with a powerful analysis of all of the natural resource laws that would be threatened by this proposed treaty.

Groups in Asia were the first to raise questions about the MAI, but the discussion soon was carried to every corner of the planet where community groups, environmentalists, farmers, and others began to analyze the implications. They began to express their concerns to governments, which began to understand the serious problems and to speak up themselves. The government of British Columbia is one of those who responded to local concerns prompted by the initial efforts of our colleagues from Asia. It is this kind of global information sharing and cooperative action that is needed to address the global nature of policymaking today. So much of our lives is guided or limited by global policies – we must rely on global cooperation with our allies to influence these policies in positive, sustainable directions.

I could give many examples of successful global cooperation helping to bolster sustainability. But as I stated earlier, I have found that I have to devote at least half of my efforts to overcoming the barriers created by or combating the negative effects of economic globalization. In that spirit I want to give equal time to talking about the threats of globalization.

First, perhaps it is useful to give a little more precision to the term. Globalization is the economic buzzword of the moment, dominating business literature, magazine articles, seminars, consultants, and so forth. In some ways it is a fairly simple concept, the de-regulation of trade, investment, and commercial activity to accelerate the integration of sources of raw materials, labor, and buyers at the global level. The outcomes most obvious at present of these trends are downwards pressure on producer prices, incomes, and wages, homogenization of consumer tastes, mono-culturalization of cropping and livestock rearing systems, and narrowing of diversity in all aspects of production including biological diversity, dispersed ownership of productive resources, and social alternatives and options.

There is now a seemingly endless stream of books, journal articles, newspaper reports, movies, and other materials documenting some specific aspect of

globalization and how that is negatively impacting sustainability, especially food safety and sustainable agriculture. Last week's New York Times, one of the world's most powerful voices promoting economic globalization as the solution to all of our ills, an a front page article in the business section called "Where Business Rules" described in exquisite detail the way the World Trade Organization, one of the policymaking arms of the new global economy, was being used by private companies to reverse or weaken consumer safety standards and other regulations vital to promoting sustainable agriculture.

While I think it is important to monitor and respond vigorously to all of these specific attacks on sustainable agriculture, this is not enough. The dangers of globalization are clear to many if not most of the society and they do not need extensive education on the matter. In fact, Robert Rubin, the US Treasury Secretary said after the defeat of fast track in the US that the US people just had not been educated enough on the need for globalization.

What we need is new ways of thinking, new ways of perceiving, new ways of acting. The society at large knows we have to move in a sustainable direction, but don't know what that really means yet, and is discouraged by the barriers of implied inevitability in the globalization argument. We have to tackle this head on if we are going to make the fundamental shift that most of us in this room know we need to work to save the planet.

Which brings me back to British Columbia, UBC, and the incredible things that I see happening here. I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel all over this planet and to work with incredible people, mostly grassroots farmer, peasant, and environmental groups, in nearly 100 countries. I have been impressed over the years with what I had heard about the important work that had been going on here around sustainability in general, like the groundbreaking work of William Rees. I had a little closer look on a few trips I made up here to speak to the annual meetings of different farm groups, like the chicken producers association.

But it wasn't until last year, when I got a chance to begin working in partnership with several of the groups here, that I began to understand the truly global impact and importance of BC as an incubator, testing, and proving ground for new ideas and new approaches in sustainability.

This is especially true in agriculture. Lots of folks think about British Columbia and think about the timber industry, forestry, tourism – but many do not know about the important developments in sustainable food production going on here. British Columbia is leading the way in a number of areas, including urban rural linkages, urban food production, combating sprawl, greenbelts and greenways, celebration of food, exploration of the role of urban food systems, incorporation of the chefs in the debate, and in the development of local policy initiatives.

In addition, there is a great deal of intellectual work going on here impacting other regions in areas such as ethics and food security. In other countries there are many important initiatives, but they are often bright lights in an

otherwise dark sky, while in BC there is a whole movement of people and communities working to develop a truly sustainable food system that works for everyone and for the planet.

I raise these examples not just to remind you about all of the good things going on here in BC – most of you know this better than I do. I want to remind you that these important elements of BC need to be consciously and actively shared with other interested people in the rest of the world.

It is a little bit like the incredible beauty of BC—it may be hard at times to share this with visitors but it is an important thing for several reasons. First, it is part of the economy. Second, it is important for the soul of humanity to see and feel this beauty – it is really that spectacular. Third, it is important for others to know about this beauty because you may need them to help protect it. Outside forces can destroy your beautiful place just as they have other places., and in the globalized economy it can happen here as it has in other places.

And the same thing is true about sharing with the world your knowledge, experiences, and wisdom. Like your beauty, it may be hard to do sometimes but I would argue that it is very important, for similar reasons.

First, it is important to your economy. In the new economy it will be intelligence, experience, skills, and wisdom that have value and that provide good standards of living without destroying the planet.

Second, it is good for all of humanity to develop a more sustainable agriculture if for no other reason than for survival and justice. World peace is far more at risk from food, water, and land shortages than from any other single factors.

Third, like your natural beauty, you may find times when you need help from others around the rest of the world to help defend some aspect of your food or farming policy from direct or indirect attacks that will come in the global economy. For example, laws that support and encourage sustainable farming here in the province could be threatened by newly proposed trade rules that would sharply limit what local and provincial governments can do to protect local producers.

Another example is the attack by dairy and chicken companies in the United States, New Zealand, and elsewhere on the supply management system that you have in Canada to protect family-sized producers. While these policies have been seriously attacked in the past in trade negotiations they have survived and remain a model for much of the rest of the world. If key individuals and groups in other countries knew more about this system they could be better defenders of it in their global policy lobbying.

British Columbia is both beautiful and intelligent. Your beauty and intelligence Both of these, however, can and will be seriously compromised by outside forces unless they are vigorously defended. I believe that one way to defend them is to share them with others around the world in ways that create

powerful forces wanting to defend what you have here--like the intact ecosystems and innovations in sustainability.

There is a big secret in the world, one that most of us in this room know and that most politicians and other folks don't get. That is the role of agriculture in impacting ecology, politics, human rights, and society as a whole. Most folks don't know that over half of the people on the planet are farmers or that a huge percentage of the land and water resources are directly or indirectly impacted by agriculture. The ignorance of agriculture's role has led to the idea we do not have to, as a whole society, pay very close attention to the land, to the farmers or to the food. Food will just be there when we want it, where we want it, and at a price so low most people don't need to hardly think about it.

But we are entering a new era that I believe will change this assumption. Agriculture is being asked to grow more calories and more fiber than ever before, to feed and clothe ever larger populations. At the same time we are being asked to produce more raw materials and fuels as we come to see the impossibility of continuing down this path of near total reliance on hydrocarbon based products such as gas, oil, coal, and petroleum.

Simultaneously, we are being asked to produce these larger crops on less land and with fewer chemical and energy-intensive inputs. We are beginning to reach the limits of our ability to use more and more pesticides and fertilizers due to the environmental degradation that we have already caused.

This is the challenge that we feel in North America, and that many have been responding to here in BC. It is that challenge that most nations will find themselves facing in the future. The breakthroughs that you make here will be crucial for others around the planet.

This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of a very important event in human history, the adoption by all of the nations of the planet of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A number of Canadians, including John Humphries, were central figures in the drafting and eventual adoption of this Magna Charter of Humanity as this has been called.

Article 25 reads like this "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services". In other words -- food, shelter, clothing, and medical care are basic human rights. Article 23 says, that gainful employment is a basic human right. Article 26 states that education is a right.

As you are transforming yourselves here at UBC to tackle the great challenge of the future -- sustainability, I want to urge you to continue to carry the torch for the challenges that faced us in the past and of course still face us today. The human right to food is complex. It is not enough to just say it. We must produce enough food to feed 6 billion going to 8. But it is not enough to just produce this in one crop cycle, the production has to be sustainable over time so that future generations have productive land and water and adequate



biodiversity. But it takes even more, because it isn't just a matter of enough food on the table -- that food needs to be safe and nutritious. And finally there has to be an economy and a society that ensures that everyone can get enough of the safe and sustainably produced food.

If sustainability is your motto, then issues like human rights and justice have to be just as important as tithing, biodiversity, and regeneration. Sustainability is a holistic concept, including society, economy, ecology.

This year is an opportunity to bring it all together -- the ecological, economic, and political aspects of sustainability. It is a chance to show the world both the beauty and intelligence of British Columbia, and a chance to develop the base of interest, education, concern, and solidarity among people in other corners of the planet to help you defend what you have from those forces who would take it away.