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## MLT NEWSLETTER SPRING 2018

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### Cultivating Resilient Communities

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*If you were hovering by your mailbox last fall for this newsletter issue and wondering if there was one, well the answer is: There wasn't! Occasionally our powerhouse writers Rita and Maynard need a break! Seriously, don't hesitate to write something up and send it to [tomar@i2k.com](mailto:tomar@i2k.com).*

*In this first article, Maynard promotes homesteading and organic farming as a solution to global warming by sequestering carbon in soils. This is not so different from our previous focus on homesteading and low input farming as a solution to "peak oil" and coming fossil fuel scarcity. MLT's reason to be is even more imperative!*

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### ***DOES MLT STILL HAVE A RAISON D'ETRE?***

Maynard Kaufman

When Joe Filonowicz originally proposed the idea of a land trust as a business arrangement, in which it would acquire land by purchase or donation and lease it out to young farmers, the Internal Revenue Service initially refused to approve it under Section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS Code. They suggested that the land trust should have an educational function to qualify as a non-profit organization. In a remarkable synchronicity, I was able to provide that by bringing out my plan for a homesteading program to be offered at Western Michigan University. So the land trust made the

homesteading program possible and the homesteading program made the land trust possible. Approval by the IRS allowed Joe to buy a farm across the street from ours and donate it to Michigan Land Trustees. So MLT became a reality and still is after 40 years. When a new administrator at WMU ended its support for the homesteading program, it continued to be supported by MLT for a few years.

The idea of back-to-the-land homesteading in the 1970s emerged in the context of energy shortages. Then, as the energy issue lost its urgency and the homesteading movement slowed in the 1980s, MLT lost its focus on making land available and on careful land use with organic methods. It helped other groups in the area to develop local food programs. For a while it promoted permaculture but failed to maintain this commitment, unfortunately. All these were and remain worthwhile projects, but they do not very directly help to make land available to young farmers who want to farm organically.

But under the threat of climate change we now face a more serious problem than anything we faced in the 1970s. This is also energy related, but our problem is that too much fossil fuel has been burned for energy and it has polluted our atmosphere with carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas which is warming the planet. A partial solution may be found in organic farming and gardening which builds up organic matter (58% carbon) in the soil, and, through photosynthesis, takes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and fixes it in the soil. Gene Logsdon, in his final book, refers to these as “new garden farms.” He published “Letter to a Young Farmer” shortly before he died recently. Since all of this can and must be done without burning fossil fuels, we are back to another new homesteading movement along with other food systems that do not rely on fossil fuels.

Given the circumstances in which we live, I am proposing a renewed focus on homesteading and organic gardening as our *raison d’être* in an effort to keep the earth as a habitable home. It is important to promote the practice of homesteading for its own intrinsic satisfaction and not as a means to an end outside of it. One way of making this happen, should the board choose to do it, would be to advertise this effort and solicit new board members who would also feel the urgency of this project.

On the other hand, new developments in agricultural land trusts may also open new possibilities Green America (<http://greenamerica.org>) for us. See, for example, the website of the “Sustainable Iowa Land Trust,” SILT. It may provide us with new ideas. <https://silt.org>

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## ***RECOMMENDED READINGS***

Rita Bober

The web site of **Green America** explores the themes of “regenerative agriculture, “carbon

farming” and alleviating climate change. Green America's mission is to harness economic power - the strength of consumers, investors, businesses, and the marketplace – to create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society. They work for a world where all people have enough, where all communities are healthy and safe, and where the bounty of the Earth is preserved for all the generations to come. Norm and I have been members since 2000. We receive quarterly magazines with articles on issues they are working on and a yearly booklet on "green" businesses called: National Green Pages.

We were particularly struck by Paul Hawken’s work (<https://greenamerica.org/magazine/climate-change-100-reasons-hope>), which shares information from his most recent book: Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed To Reverse Global Warming.

“Generally, we think of global warming as happening to us. We screwed up in the past, and we’re still screwing up. There’s an implied guilt of individuals and shaming of companies.

But we need to ask ourselves this question: Is global warming happening to us or for us? If it’s happening to you, you’re the victim and disempowered. You probably will fight or think that way. Or be angry. Or be resigned.

Or you can think about it happening for us, for you. This Earth is a system-beautiful, miraculous, intricate, and extraordinarily sacred. When the weather changes, there’s feedback. Anytime you ignore feedback from a system, the system perishes. Global warming is feedback. It’s actually a gift. It’s an offering. It’s a gentle nudge.

Okay, it doesn’t feel very gentle. But if you step back, it’s a slight variation in global temperatures. Addressing it is a pathway to transformation, creating a far better civilization than the one we live in now; far kinder, more compassionate, more inventive, cleaner, and restorative.

Once you think of it as for you, you can take 100 percent responsibility. It’s totally liberating to be the person who is going to address and solve something. The point is that it invites creativity, imagination, celebration. It invites you to be an extraordinary human being. It’s also about knowing that you can’t do it alone.” (p. 19)

Continued reduction of refrigerant chlorofluorocarbons and hydro-chlorofluorocarbons, increased wind turbines, reducing food waste, adoption of a plant-rich diet, tropical forest restoration, solar farms, and rooftop solar are some of the ways to begin reversing global warming.”

*More details are available in the Winter, 2017 issue of Green America Magazine* (<https://greenamerica.org/magazine/climate-change-100-reasons-hope>). Green America’s sustainable food and agriculture teams have been focusing on developing the plans, the networks, and the campaigns to tap into plant power, through regenerative agriculture.

### **Regenerative Agriculture and Green America’s New Re(Store) It! Campaign**

<https://greenamerica.org/media-mention/restore-it-campaign-promotes-regenerative-agriculture-practices-bolster-soil-health-and-fight-climate-change>

“Green America is proud to announce our latest program to address the climate crisis: The Re(Store) It! Campaign aims to give a big boost to regenerative agriculture, a type of farming that turns dead dirt into rich soil that acts as a carbon sink. Instead of just curbing the climate crisis, widespread adoption of regenerative agriculture could actually help reverse it. A paper by the Rodale Institute says that humans could sequester 100 percent of current annual carbon-dioxide emissions with a worldwide switch to regenerative agriculture.

The Earth's soils used to be rich in carbon, but decades of industrial agriculture have left fields degraded. Massive tilling compacts soil so few air pockets exist, meaning it retains much less water and is more susceptible to drought and erosion. Chemical inputs kill off soil microbes that digest carbon and naturally fertilize the soil.

The transformation of rich soil into dead dirt means that the carbon that was once sequestered in the ground is now in our atmosphere as climate-warming CO<sub>2</sub>. Regenerative agriculture provides a solution to the twin issues of climate change and feeding the growing global population. Employing age-old techniques like crop rotation, conservation tillage, mulching, composting and more, removes carbon from the air and stores it in the ground. It also builds rich soils, which, in turn, increases farm production. According to the UN Food & Agriculture Organization, the world could produce 58 percent more food through regenerative farming.

The Re(Store) It! Campaign aims to educate the public about these benefits, so conscious consumers can support the farmers and businesses that use regenerative agricultural methods. It also works to create a better understanding of farmers as important stewards of the land. And it helps individuals get involved in the solution, by helping them locate nearby restorative "climate gardens" and start their own.

In the last century, we've been reliant on industrial agriculture that has harmed our lands, water, and people," says Anna Meyer, food campaigns director at Green America. "Regenerative and organic agriculture is the way forward, as it brings ecology, climate science, and human well-being to the forefront of farming. When it's implemented widely, it will ensure a hospitable planet for generations to come." Re(Store) It! Joins our Carbon Farming program, which works on building the supply chain for agriculture that reverses the climate arrow in a powerful demand and supply strategy. Learn more and keep up to date on this campaign at <https://www.greenamerica.org/restore-it> .

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*I've been intrigued by the idea of a universal basic income since reading "Utopia for Realists" by Rutger Bregman. UBI would supplant welfare as we know it along with its indignities and its possible suppression of the work ethic. When combined with a much more progressive income tax it would do much to reduce income inequality. If it were even combined with a single payer healthcare system, small business entrepreneurs including homesteaders, small farmers, and "cottage industrialists" would have the security needed to take on more risk and get started.*

## **The Need for Universal Basic Income**

Maynard Kaufman

The subtitle of another book, *The War on Normal People* by Andrew Yang more accurately describes the book: *The Truth About America's Disappearing Jobs and Why Universal Basic Income is Our Future*. The book was published in 2018 by Hachette Books.

The first two parts of the book describe the many forms of automation that are already replacing workers: "artificial intelligence, machine learning, self-driving vehicles,

advanced robotics, smart phones, drones, 3D printing, virtual and augmented reality, the Internet of things, genomics, digital currencies, and nanotechnology” p. 70. The book argues that this electronic revolution is more comprehensive and affects more workers than the industrial revolution in agriculture that reduced the number of farm workers.

The main argument of the book is that these new developments already are curtailing the opportunity of jobs for many people and will increasingly continue to do so. The effects on workers are, to say the least, demoralizing, and the middle part of the book describes the social effects of massive unemployment. The first part of the book details where automation is replacing workers; he calls it “The Great Displacement.” For example, as self-driving trucks evolve, some 3.5 million truck drivers, and another 7 million workers that serve the needs of truck drivers, are at risk of losing their jobs (p. 45). Virtually all routine jobs could be replaced by artificial intelligence, including much work by medical doctors.

After a detailed and thorough review of the loss of jobs and its corrosive social effects, in the first two parts, the author argues for his solution in part three: a universal basic income (UBI) of one thousand dollars a month for every adult. This is not quite enough to live on and is not likely to destroy the incentive to earn more. He also gives convincing reasons why our government can afford this large expenditure, and proposes it be done through a value-added tax. He sees UBI as a kind of human capitalism, which would maximize human well-being and fulfillment. Proposals for a universal basic income, which Andrew Yang also calls a “Freedom Dividend,” and others have called a guaranteed annual wage, have a long history and wide support, and now, as globalization and automation continue to reduce jobs for Americans, it should become law.

Unfortunately, there are two major weaknesses in the way Mr. Yang makes his proposal. The first is that his vision neglects climate change as caused by burning fossil fuels. Neither term is in his index. Instead of self-driving trucks, more freight may be shipped by rail. But we do live in a time when human labor may be replacing some energy-intensive machines. This is especially important in agriculture and food production and distribution, which uses the most energy, as much as ten calories for each calorie produced.

This leads to the second weakness in Mr. Yang’s proposal: a UBI could indeed buy hope for people who lose their jobs, but it fails to provide hope for a planet threatened with climate change. It could easily be designed to help people, who are liberated from urban jobs, to find new independence as they resettle rural American and raise food to replace our obsolete industrial food system. There are growing numbers of people who would enjoy farming, but can not afford to buy land. A UBI could help to make this possible. Or it could be proposed in conjunction with a New Homesteading Act.

Many writers are optimistic about the possibility that more automation could make our future more prosperous. (See the recent book by Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*.) This would certainly support a UBI, but even if the new wealth were not shared by all, so that workers remain poor, the UBI should be a national policy so that it would help to open new possibilities to mitigate the prospect of climate change.

Please visit: [www.michiganlandtrust.org](http://www.michiganlandtrust.org) for more information about us, along with previous issues of this newsletter. Inquiries (such as for a brochure) along with donations through PayPal (if desired) may be made:

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[tomar@i2k.com](mailto:tomar@i2k.com) [www.michiganlandtrust.org](http://www.michiganlandtrust.org)

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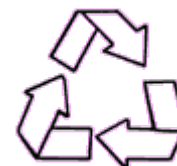
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**Michigan Land Trustees  
84757 28th St  
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