

## *The Future of Food Farming in Amherst*

A sustainable food system in Amherst must include town, suburban, and rural landscapes. In town and suburban areas it would be a matter of recapturing space from sprawling development, in the form of vacant lots, backyard gardens, small undeveloped open spaces, and even rooftops, and devoting that land to intensive home, community, and commercial market gardens, along with small flocks of hens and possibly some aquaculture. Composting programs ought to make it possible for this part of our food system to be completely organic in its nutrient requirements. Recycled food scraps could also supply an important component of feed for suburban poultry and pigs. In more rural areas, the key would be to selectively clear and restore the best pasture soils and maintain them by superb grazing management; and to practice integrated mixed husbandry of hay and field crops on associated croplands. The combination of imported feed grain for pigs and chickens, good manure recycling, and legumes in rotations ought to be able to supply most of the nutrients to keep such a regime highly productive, minimizing (though not eliminating) the need for additional fertilizers.

This system could have large environmental benefits including a greener downtown and suburban neighborhoods, reduced energy costs, increased carbon sequestration, protected watersheds, and habitat for open land species. Working forests could be closely integrated as well, providing products such as maple syrup, game, sustainable wood products, and biofuels. The system would also have large social benefits by supporting rural economies and allowing many more people to be involved in food production, in a wide variety of ways.

It is very unlikely that New England ever could (or would really want to) grow all its own food. That would require clearing increasingly fragmented forestland in order to create increasingly marginal farmland, which would be a choice we should hope never to be driven to. It appears that our region will always want to import a substantial part of its grain, oils, sugar, peanuts, and of course tropical fruits, tea, coffee, and wine. Sustainable farming and healthy eating in New England will thus need to be connected to, and to support, sustainable farming in other parts of the world. But New England could provide a remarkably large part of its own food, and Amherst could play a leading role in that transformation.