

Environment

Tait Farm trades fresh food for hard labor

by David Reinbold

With food prices going through the roof, some folks are looking to Tait Farm in Centre Hall for locally grown, organic food that doesn't cost them any cash—just four hours of work per week.

As part of Tait's Community Harvest program, about a dozen "work-shares" exchange their labor for weekly supplies of produce—and a chance to have a hand in the food they consume.

"So far, working for Tait has been great," said Misha Moschera, who began her commitment to Tait at the beginning of May. "I find it incredibly rewarding because I feel like people today are so detached from where their food comes from."

Erin McKinney, one half of the resident farming duo behind the Community Harvest program, said work-shares do everything except operate heavy machinery.

"They can weed, harvest, mow—everything," McKinney said.

Though there's a waiting list for work-shares, Tait may soon add a few more names to the list of 170 Community Harvest members who purchase half-year or full-year shares—which cost \$600 and \$1,000, respectively—for weekly supplies of fresh produce.

Brittany Harris is a volunteer who recently began working for Tait Farm. She said community-supported agriculture is the wave of the future in farming.

"In 10 to 15 years, (CSAs) are going to have to grow larger if we want to keep living the way we do," said Harris, who looks to the ever-rising cost of food and energy as

a precursor of what's to come.

"We can't keep transporting food from places that are far away," Harris said. "We need to start buying locally and cut down on our carbon footprints."

The Community Harvest program, which owner Kim Tait said is attracting more people than ever, seems to be riding the wave of popularity of CSA nationwide.

CSA is an innovative business model breathing new life into small farms that are struggling to survive in an industry dominated by large corporations.

Tait explained that the farm can better ensure financial stability by selling shares, because members, by paying for a yearly subscription, assume some of the financial risk associated with fluctuations in growing conditions and market prices.

Many farms with CSA programs are also rolling out work-share initiatives similar to Tait's, because bartering products for physical labor helps them to cut costs.

Both membership and work-share programs keep interest piqued by allowing for closer consumer-producer relationships.

"We have all these professional people in our lives: doctors, lawyers, dentists, etc.," Tait said. "But most people don't know who their farmer is. It's like, 'Do you know where your food is coming from?'"

The exact beginning of CSA in the United States is debatable, but according to Local Harvest, an organization that promotes locally grown food, there were about 50 CSAs in 1990. Today that number has grown to more than 1,000.

"This year we find ourselves in an interesting position," said Tait of the 25-member



Photo by David Reinbold

Erin McKinney and Steve Spanelli, the driving forces behind Tait Farm's Community Harvest program, stand in front of the 1941 Alice Chalmers tractor that is still used on the farm today.

waiting list. "We've never had that before, and we want to wait until the season gets rolling until we commit to too many people."

According to Tait, the 10 acres of land currently dedicated to the Community Harvest program yield enough crops to supply the program's members and work-shares, as well as the farm's retail store and farmers market booths.

Tait said membership will likely max out at 200.

"Culturally, I think what's happening is

all the dots are being connected," Tait said. "Groceries are going up, gas has been going up, and now people are saying, 'It's probably healthier if it's grown locally. It's probably cheaper.'"

For Moschera, it's also about overcoming our alienation from food production.

"I think everyone should have an opportunity to work on a farm and actually work for their food," Moschera said. "As cliché as it sounds, I really do feel a connection to where my food is coming from and a stronger connection with the earth."

Going green: tips to make your home energy-efficient

by Sakiba Khan

With energy costs and green awareness on the rise, homeowners are lining up to make their homes more energy-efficient. But they want to know how much it will cost, whether the savings outweigh the expense, and where and how to find the supplies.

An eager go-green crowd of about 65 gathered at Schlow Centre Region Library in May to hear Liam Goble, founder of Envinity Green Design and Construction,

fill in the blanks.

Envinity is a local company that designs energy-efficient homes using sustainable, local materials and consults on and performs energy-efficient renovations. For three years, Envinity has also conducted energy audits for homes, apartment complexes and businesses in and around State College.

Goble said the company approaches each project "as if it were one's own, and guided by patience, intention and imagination."

Most green novices want to know where

to begin. Goble answered this by first stating where not to begin. Lots of time is spent trying to fix or replace windows, but that's not as effective as renovating other parts of the home, he said.

Most homes have double-pane windows. Upgrading them to better double-pane windows is expensive and not very effective, since all double-pane windows insulate fairly well. Many years will need to pass for the savings to outweigh the expenditures.

However, if the house is Victorian, it's likely that the windows are single-pane,

Goble explained. In that case, energy is lost more rapidly, so upgrading to a double-pane window is a real energy saver. If an owner is hesitant about changing the aesthetic look of a Victorian home even slightly, then there is no easy answer to the energy-efficiency dilemma, Goble said.

The most important thing, he said, is to make sure the house or apartment has good insulation.

see Going green, pg. 16

Technology won't solve all our energy problems

by Andy Lau

I hope that some of you saw Amory Lovins, director of the Rocky Mountain Institute, when he spoke at Penn State April 29. Lovins established himself as a visionary back in the 1970s with his book *Soft Energy Paths*.

Although industry experts rejected his idea that the future for electricity production was in distributed power, as opposed to large central plants, that vision has largely become reality.

In recent years, he has emphasized that by cleverly using readily available technologies to do things more efficiently, we can reduce energy use by a factor of 10. He refers to these units of energy saved as “negawatts,” arguing that it is more cost-effective to save energy via efficiency than to build and operate new power plants.

In the book *Winning the Oil Endgame*, Lovins and others argue that we could displace oil by 2025 using four strategies: (1) double the efficiency of oil use; (2) apply creative business models and public policies



to speed adoption of superefficient vehicles, buildings and factories; (3) substitute biofuels for one-fourth of gasoline use; (4) save one-half of natural gas use via efficiency, and substitute part of the saved gas for the remaining oil use.

I admit that there is some appeal to the idea of technology and a restructured energy industry solving our energy challenges. It relieves me and my neighbors from the burden of examining our way of life, which developed from the recent era of cheap and

plentiful fossil fuels, and envisioning a 21st century way of life in harmony with solar energy flows. Nor do we have to take the tough personal and community actions that are necessary to realize that harmonious vision.

As appealing as the idea of a technological cornucopia is, I am skeptical about its long-term viability. We simply use too many of the Earth's resources, partly due to the sheer number of us, and partly due to the affluent way of life in the developed world. If each American had to obtain a year's supply of energy from bicycle generators, it would take about 282 people pedaling full-time for a year, at a cost of \$6 million a year to pay them.

And if everyone on Earth lived like us, we would need more than five planets to provide our resources and take care of our wastes.

Coupled with the physical limits of fossil fuels—they are finite and will run out in a few lifetimes—is the reality that using fossil fuels seriously damages the Earth. The most pressing problem is climate change,

which results from the carbon dioxide released when fossil fuels are burned; but on the other end of the fuel cycle, we have serious environmental challenges to harvesting and processing fossil fuels. The next time you hear of “clean coal,” consider the coal mining practice known as mountaintop removal, in which hundreds of feet of “overburden” are stripped off in order to get at coal seams.

Lovins recognizes that we need to reduce our impact on the planet by a factor of 10 or more within the next 25 to 50 years. Yet he seems to think that we can achieve that goal via technological improvements alone. I think it's going to take a combination of technology and a major shift of worldview. In order to fully utilize natural energy flows, we are going to have to develop a worldview that emphasizes the right relationships, both within human communities and with the other living systems we are immersed in.

Using Daniel Quinn's terms from *Ishmael*, we need to evolve from being “takers” to being “leavers.”



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Scarlet tanager brings tropical flare to Pa. forests

by Alice Fuller

BIRD
Watch

Bits of flaming red brighten the shadows of our woodlands in spring and summer. More than any other songbird, the scarlet tanager brings the exotic flare of the tropics to northeastern forests. Fortunately for Pennsylvania bird-watchers, the tanager is widely distributed throughout the Keystone State. According to the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania*, bird-count workers found tanagers in nearly 87 percent of the state's Atlas blocks.

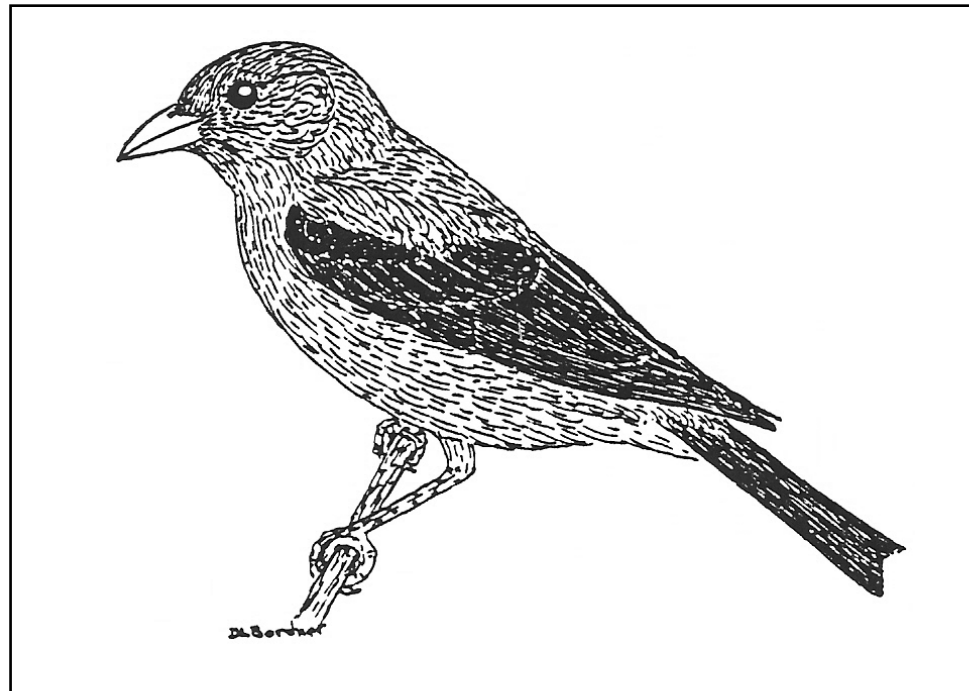
Many folks, even those who frequently wander the numerous mountain roads, may not be aware of this striking bird's presence. Winsor Marrett Tyler, who wrote the account of the scarlet tanager in the A. C. Bent life history series, observed, "The scarlet tanager is a bird of contradictions. It possesses a brilliancy of plumage almost unrivaled among North American birds, yet the tanager, even the scarlet male, is seldom conspicuous; its characteristic song is diagnostic to those of us who know it well, yet when the tanager is heard singing, it is often mistaken for a robin, a rose-breasted gros-

beak, or even for a red-eyed vireo, birds which sing somewhat like it: thus, unseen and unheard (or unregarded), it is often considered a rare bird, even in localities where it breeds commonly. The behavior of the tanager largely accounts for this anomaly."

"The expanding leaves are fast shading the bare branches, shutting from our view countless perches in the treetops where a bird may be almost invisible, so that the tanager, an arboreal bird of quiet demeanor, practically disappears from sight, hidden in the labyrinth of leafy branches."

A few years ago, Dorothy Bordner and I took a birder from California on a morning's outing along some of our mountain roads. In addition to hoping to see some of our many resident warblers, our guest also wished to see a scarlet tanager.

The tanager male is an incessant singer, and we heard many birds singing as we



wound our way by car through a section of Seven Mountains. I dropped my companions off at a good spot while I went on to park the car at the Bear Meadows Natural Area.

Later, I asked Dorothy if our guest, Mr. Currie, did indeed see a tanager. She replied that he had, at the place at which I'd dropped them. He called to her that he was looking at a red bird. She asked if it had black wings, and when he replied that it did, she informed him that he was observing a scarlet tanager.

Unfortunately, Dorothy's drawing cannot depict the brilliant crimson of the male, but it does show the glossy black of the wings and tail, which accent the bird's red body. One can never, ever see enough scarlet tanagers.

As one author put it, "The bird is a delight, this magnificently attired scarlet tanager, a sight just as thrilling to veteran bird-watchers as to those catching their first glimpse of it." More than 100 years ago, another observer said, "His plumage seems burning among the leaves."

The female wears a subdued outfit, consisting of a dull-green back and yellowish breast, to protect her as she sits on her nest. Before he makes the long journey to wintering grounds in northern South America, the male will shed the red feathers and molt into a traveling suit of green, looking more like his spouse.

Most of us locate a tanager by his constant singing. His song has been described as sounding like a robin with a cold or a sore throat. I learned it from my ornitholo-

gy professor as "hurry, worry, flurry, flurry."

It is a pleasant song but not a distinguished one. As a rule of thumb, the finest songsters wear a plain plumage, as is the case with hermit and wood thrushes; veeries; song and vesper sparrows; winter wrens; and their western cousins, the canyon wrens. Birds donned in brilliant feathers seldom are such talented songsters.

Besides adorning our woods with his beauty, the tanager provides a useful service. Edward H. Forbush once wrote, "In its food preferences, the tanager is the appointed guardian of the oaks. It is drawn to these trees as if they were magnets, but the chief attraction seems to be the vast numbers of insects that feed upon them.

It is safe to say that, of all the many hundreds of insects that feed upon the oaks, few escape paying tribute to the tanager at some period of their existence. We are much indebted to this beautiful bird for its share in the preservation of these noble and valuable trees."

During a recent trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway, we saw many trees stripped of leaves by gypsy moth larvae, and we also heard many tanagers.

During a major gypsy moth outbreak, the pests are so numerous that they cannot be controlled by tanagers, cuckoos and the other birds and small mammals that are fond of caterpillars.

We can be grateful, though, that during most years, we have a beautiful bird helping to protect our extensive and wonderful woodlands.

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from Going green, pg. 13

"A green home should not be a cold home," Goble said, emphasizing the importance of comfort in an environmentally friendly home.

Tips for new-home construction

For those in the midst of building a home or planning to build a home, the first step is to find an Energy Star company in the area,

There are other economic incentives—aside from lower energy bills—for new homeowners to build energy-efficient homes. Energy Star offers a \$2,000 tax credit for contractors, and the Pennsylvania Home Energy program offers modest incentives of \$200 to \$1,000 for owners of new and existing homes to take steps to reduce consumption.

Goble said. Energy Star is a federal energy-efficiency rating system for companies that provide products and services to achieve better energy performance, greater comfort and lower bills. In the past year, Energy Star products saved a total of \$6 million in energy bills in the United States, Goble said.

The next step for home builders is to get a Home Energy Rating System rating, which is based on an analysis of the home's design. From the analysis, the home is given a score between 0 and 100. The lower a home's HERS score, the more energy-efficient it is.

Careful attention to construction will limit the need for costly and complicated energy improvements in the future, Goble said. Tight construction makes for cleaner indoor air by keeping out dust, pollen, car exhaust and other pollutants. It also reduces energy costs by retaining warm air in the winter and cool air in the summer.

But Goble reminded the group that tight construction requires proper ventilation to bring in fresh air and exhaust stale air. An example of a proper ventilator in this case would be the Performance Energy Recovery Ventilator, which is designed to exchange heat from inside the home to outside it.

The location of the home is also important when trying to conserve energy. Building a home in State College, for example, means needing less gas to get around. Proper siting of a new home in a more rural area can maximize the use of passive solar energy and minimize the impact of winter winds.

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Tips for existing homes

For those whose homes are already built, it's not too late to make them more energy-efficient. Goble said the first place to begin

is with a home energy audit, which involves a series of tests, including a blower door test to quantify how much air is going in and out of the home, a check of insulation with an infrared camera and a check of the mechanical system. After the tests, the auditor indicates what changes to the home would be most cost-effective and energy-efficient.

Homeowners can improve insulation by first targeting the basement. Foam should be sprayed around the rim joist—the boards

that go around the outside of the floor system. Aside from high-temperature areas, all parts of the basement and attic should be insulated with foam.

Icicles spare no home in State College—new or old. These winter gifts pose ventilation and insulation problems. Goble offered a solution to the icicle problem: Start with foam to stop the air infiltration and then reinsulate the attic with recycled materials like cellulose, a healthy alternative to traditional insulation. This cost-effective, energy-saving insulator creates a warmer roof, which melts the icicles. It also seals off air movement on the ceiling.

Though no local stores are fully devoted

to energy efficiency, environmentally friendly products can be found in locally owned businesses. A couple of good places to start are YBC and Lezzer Lumber, Goble said. Solar hot water panels are available at Bierly's in Millheim. The panels, which cost about \$6,000 for installation, usually pay for themselves in 15 to 25 years, depending on the number of people in the home.

One of the quickest things people can do to reduce their energy bills is switch to compact fluorescent bulbs. For those concerned about the mercury content of the fluorescent bulbs, Envinity offers free recycling of all such bulbs.

Home-Greening Internet Resources

To find more information on greening your home, go to <http://epa.gov/>

For state incentives and other green-home tips, go to <http://pahomeenergy.com/>

A list of Energy Star companies can be found at <http://energystar.gov/>

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