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**The One-Straw  
Revolution**



*An Introduction to Natural Farming*

With a Preface by Wendell Berry  
*Edited by Larry Korn*



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## Toward a Do-Nothing Farming

For thirty years I lived only in my farming and had little contact with people outside my own community. During those years I was heading in a straight line toward a "do-nothing" agricultural method.

The usual way to go about developing a method is to ask "How about trying this?" or "How about trying that?" bringing in a variety of techniques one upon the other. This is modern agriculture and it only results in making the farmer busier.

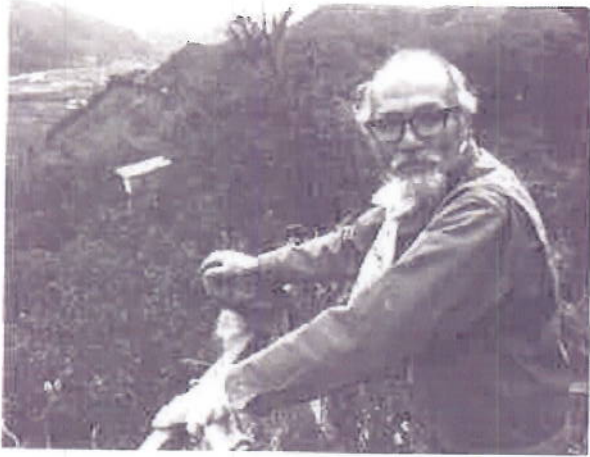
My way was opposite. I was aiming at a pleasant, natural way of farming\* which results in making the work easier instead of harder. "How about *not* doing this? How about *not* doing that?"—that was my way of thinking. I ultimately reached the conclusion that there was no need to plow, no need to apply fertilizer, no need to make compost, no need to use insecticide. When you get right down to it, there are few agricultural practices that are really necessary.

The reason that man's improved techniques seem to be necessary is that the natural balance has been so badly upset beforehand by those same techniques that the land has become dependent on them.

This line of reasoning not only applies to agriculture, but to other aspects of human society as well. Doctors and medicine become necessary when people create a sickly environment. Formal schooling has no intrinsic value, but becomes necessary when humanity creates a condition in which one must become "educated" to get along.

Before the end of the war, when I went up to the citrus orchard to practice what I then thought was natural farming, I did no pruning and left the orchard to itself. The branches became tangled, the trees were attacked by insects and almost two acres of mandarin orange trees withered and died. From that time on the question, "What is the natural pattern?" was always in my mind. In the process of arriving at the answer, I wiped out another 400 trees. Finally I felt I could say with certainty: "This is the natural pattern."

\* Farming as simply as possible within and in cooperation with the natural environment, rather than the modern approach of applying increasingly complex techniques to remake nature entirely for the benefit of human beings.



"For thirty years I lived only in my farming...."

To the extent that trees deviate from their natural form, pruning and insect extermination become necessary; to the extent that human society separates itself from a life close to nature, schooling becomes necessary. In nature, formal schooling has no function.

In raising children, many parents make the same mistake I made in the orchard at first. For example, teaching music to children is as unnecessary as pruning orchard trees. A child's ear catches the music. The murmuring of a stream, the sound of frogs croaking by the riverbank, the rustling of leaves in the forest, all these natural sounds are music—true music. But when a variety of disturbing noises enter and confuse the ear, the child's pure, direct appreciation of music degenerates. If left to continue along that path, the child will be unable to hear the call of a bird or the sound of the wind as songs. That is why music education is thought to be beneficial to the child's development.

The child who is raised with an ear pure and clear may not be able to play the popular tunes on the violin or the piano, but I do not think this has anything to do with the ability to hear true music or to sing. It is when the heart is filled with song that the child can be said to be musically gifted.

Almost everyone thinks that "nature" is a good thing, but few can grasp the difference between natural and unnatural.

If a single new bud is snipped off a fruit tree with a pair of scissors, that may bring about disorder which cannot be undone. When growing according to the natural form, branches spread alternately from the trunk and the leaves

receive sunlight uniformly. If this sequence is disrupted the branches come into conflict, lie one upon another and become tangled, and the leaves wither in the places where the sun cannot penetrate. Insect damage develops. If the tree is not pruned the following year more withered branches will appear.

Human beings with their tampering do something wrong, leave the damage unrepaired, and when the adverse results accumulate, work with all their might to correct them. When the corrective actions appear to be successful, they come to view these measures as splendid accomplishments. People do this over and over again. It is as if a fool were to stomp on and break the tiles of his roof. Then when it starts to rain and the ceiling begins to rot away, he hastily climbs up to mend the damage, rejoicing in the end that he has accomplished a miraculous solution.

It is the same with the scientist. He pores over books night and day, straining his eyes and becoming nearsighted, and if you wonder what on earth he has been working on all that time—it is to become the inventor of eyeglasses to correct nearsightedness.