Sustainable Horticulture and Rural Development: More than just Organic Production

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Abstract

In the age of globalization, sustainability and rural development are intimately connected and ultimately challenged. Sustainability is vague and so co-opted as to be almost meaningless, while rural development is often reduced to economic development, without any consideration of how this could affect sustainability. Amidst such confusion, what does sustainable horticulture mean and how can it contribute to rural development? This paper will present a new meaning for sustainability, tying it to the concept of the civil commons. From this baseline of understanding, it will then give fresh meaning to the term sustainable horticulture, allowing it to become a vehicle for the improvement of human and environmental well-being, not a means of making ever-increasing private profits, regardless of the social, environmental and even economic costs. The organic approach to production forms a natural alliance with sustainability, blending to produce a form of horticulture that has the potential to be economically constructive, socially responsible and environmentally sound. Such a sustainable horticulture would contribute to rural development in the full sense of the term, not as endless growth for rootless investors but as the unfolding of potential for more than just the lucky few. In our globalized world, four out of every five people have been made poor, the climate has been destabilized and we experience endless war for control of dwindling resources. Horticulture can either exacerbate these problems or help to solve them. A truly sustainable horticulture would not only be organic, but also produce social, environmental and economic justice, thus contributing to rural development on a global scale and becoming part of what has been referred to as sustainable globalization.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable horticulture conjures up images of small-scale farming, organic vegetables and locally grown ornamentals. It is a feel-good term that is long on intuition and short on precision. In addition, it is often used in a very narrow sense - to simply convey organic forms of production.

But sustainable horticulture carries the potential of much more than merely organic methods of production. As a relatively recent offspring of the mother concept of sustainability, it encompasses broad environmental, social and economic parameters. In this sense, sustainable horticulture introduces deeper questions regarding the interconnections between sustainability, organic horticulture and rural development.

Sustainable horticulture is a fairly new term in the English language, and the field is considered to be “still in its infancy” (Poincelot, 2004). For this reason, the term is fluid and difficult to pin down, and often not defined at all. In addition, some people use sustainable horticulture interchangeably with sustainable agriculture, which only makes the term confusing.

This confusion is compounded when, for example, the University of New Hampshire has a web page asking, “What is Sustainable Horticulture?,” but goes on to define the two terms separately, and to discuss sustainable agricultural systems under the definition of sustainability.

When it is actually defined, sustainable horticulture is seen as a combination of production and distribution. For example, the World Bank argues that it "relates to a holistic perspective on production and distribution methods, which are designed to create a minimal impact on the environment and the people" (Labaste, 2005).

To deepen the discussion of definitions, it is instructive to consider the words of Richard Shearman (1990), who argues that when we use sustainability as a modifier in compound terms such as sustainable development, it changes the way we come to understand the second half of those terms. In this way, the word 'sustainable' is used not only in a grammatical sense, as an adjective to a noun, but also in a conceptual sense, "through the implication of a contradiction." Shearman's argument implies that theory is inconsistent with practice. Otherwise, terms like sustainable development, and indeed sustainable horticulture, would be redundant.

To take Shearman's argument one step further, the combination of the word 'sustainable' with the word 'horticulture' not only implies a contradiction - that horticulture as conventionally understood is not sustainable - but also indicates a way out of this contradiction. I believe that the concept of sustainability, although indiscriminately used and often co-opted, can have a precise meaning that provides a grounded model to emulate. Adding the potential of sustainability to the field of horticulture can produce a term with far-reaching implications for research, teaching and practice.

A NEW DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE

Adding the word 'sustainable' to the term 'horticulture' moves it far beyond the narrow realm of production. The logic for this movement is embedded in the idea that there is no such thing as sustainable horticulture if the people who pick the food can't afford to buy it. Such an idea reaches beyond the strictly environmental aspects to encompass social and economic areas as well. This expansion of the concept of sustainable horticulture is implied by Raymond P. Poincelot (2004) in his book *Sustainable Horticulture Today and Tomorrow*. In his analysis of past and present definitions, he argues that the definitions he chose to highlight all incorporated the themes of "maintaining productivity, protecting environmental quality and environmental soundness, and socioeconomic soundness". Poincelot finds that all the definitions also accommodated the "schools of thought that lead to the formation of sustainable agriculture: productivity, stewardship and community". In this way, he sets the tone for a more holistic understanding of sustainable horticulture.

Poincelot (2004), however, believes that, "given the great diversity in agriculture ... it is perhaps easy to understand why we cannot arrive at one definition [that] fits all." I would like to argue that we can, with a definition of sustainable horticulture that has universal understanding coupled with particular applicability. However, developing a definition of sustainable horticulture that involves claims to universality while allowing particularity must begin with the meaning of the mother concept of sustainability itself.

DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

Within the literature, sustainability is seen in a myriad of ways. While some see it as a goal, objective or end state, others see it as a state, condition or characteristic. Some see it as a vision, an ethic, a principle or a metabelief and others as tantamount to a religion. Some reduce it to a management practice, while others dress it up as a manifestation of the second law of thermodynamics. Some associate sustainability with systems thinking and others see it as a form of mediation. And some consider it a social construct, while others argue that sustainability is a process.

In the face of widely documented negative impacts of globalization, especially on rural communities, many of these definitions are simply inadequate. They cannot begin to address the problems created or the opportunities offered in our present global era. To counter this inadequacy, we need an understanding of sustainability that can oppose the self-maximizing money-values that drive most current forms of globalization - values that promote the accumulation of money first and foremost, regardless of the environmental, social and economic consequences (McMurtry, 2002).

Working from a different values orientation, sustainability can be linked to the concept of the civil commons in order to promote increased individual, community and environmental well-being. The civil commons was developed by philosopher John McMurtry (2001) to describe "any co-operative human construct that enables the access of all members of a community to life goods." Based in what he refers to as life values (835), the civil commons is co-operative, not competitive, in its engagement with the world. It is a human construct, not a naturally occurring phenomenon, and must be built by human agency. It enables access of all community members, not just a privileged elite, so everyone has the chance to grow and express their potential, and this community can range from the local through the national to the global. And it provides life goods, which are whatever allows life to be preserved or extended on the three planes of being: thought, feeling and action. These life goods, or means of life, that the civil commons provides range from nutritious food, clean water and adequate shelter to education, healthcare, open spaces and a safe workplace. Examples of the civil commons abound, both formally through written rules and informally through local practice and tradition: from public education and universal healthcare through health and safety regulations and women's rights to environmental legislation and commonly-held land. In essence, the civil commons is the plans that people make together to ensure that life for everyone is not merely 'nasty, brutish and short.' With respect to the environment, the civil commons is "the sole protector of society's environmental life-host" (McMurtry, 1998). Whether enacted to protect common grazing grounds, old-growth forests, the ozone layer or local farmland, the civil commons is the vehicle for sustainability.

The civil commons occurs universally, but in many particular guises. For example, in rural communities it makes its appearance in barn raisings, community centres and marketing boards, while in urban communities it is evident in public parks, pedestrian malls and food banks. In developed countries it is found in old-age pensions, day-care programs and mothers' allowances, while in developing countries it can be found in community forests, communal land and extended families.

Given the existence of the civil commons, both as a descriptive term of actually occurring movements of protection and as a normative term of how the world ought to be organized, *sustainability involves a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons* (Sumner, 2005). The structures can be governments, universities, supranational bodies and even corporations, as long as they build the civil commons. The processes can be governing, teaching, learning, researching and decision-making, as long as they build the civil commons. Such a definition of sustainability is human centred, with good reason. Sustainability would not even be an issue without human destruction of the environment and of each other. We need an understanding of sustainability that can deliberately counter such destruction and build ways of life that protect, not destroy, the environment, individuals and communities.

With the definition of sustainability firmly in place, it follows that *sustainable horticulture involves horticulture that is based on a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons*. In other words, if it does not build the civil commons, it is not sustainable horticulture. Forms of horticulture that increase exports for private entrepreneurs, act as sales sites for genetically engineered organisms or degrade the land, water and air through the intensive use of pesticides and herbicides would not qualify as sustainable horticulture. But forms of horticulture that preserve the soil, involve community access to food production or contribute to nutritious school lunch programs would qualify as sustainable horticulture. In saying this, I am not dismissing private entrepreneurship or business, but they are not the route to sustainability unless they build the civil commons.

APPLICATIONS OF THE DEFINITION

If working out questions of sustainable horticulture in specific situations might be considered exercises in the particularization of universality, then applications of the definition involve particular manifestations of the universally occurring civil commons.

And just as sustainability has environmental, social and economic aspects, so does sustainable horticulture. Each aspect of sustainable horticulture, in turn, has two facets: either within the farm gate or beyond the farm gate. The following brief outline presents some of the parameters of a sustainable horticulture.

Environmental Aspects

The environmental aspects of sustainability are the real bottom line in any understanding of sustainability. This was made clear by Canadian Ronald Wright (2004) in his book, *A Short History of Progress*, when he stated that "The lesson I read in the past is this: that the health of land and water - and of woods, which are the keepers of water - can be the only lasting basis for any civilization's survival and success." His study of past civilizations shows us how they collapsed, and often collapsed heavily, when they crossed this line. Over millennia, however, there is also evidence that the health of land, water and woods has been protected by the civil commons. Common grazing lands, communal water sources and sacred groves are examples of co-operative human plans to ensure universal access to life goods. In our present globalized world, Wright warns us that:

> *Human beings drove themselves out of Eden, and they have done it again and again by fouling their own nests. If we want to live in an earthly paradise, it is up to us to shape it, share it, and look after it.*

The vehicle for shaping it, sharing it and looking after it is the civil commons - co-operative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to environmental life goods. International conventions on climate change and dumping, national legislation on natural resource use, provincial regulations on green belts, and municipal bylaws to prevent the "development" of productive farmland are all examples of the civil commons in action.

For horticulture to be sustainable in the environmental sense, it would need to build the civil commons both within and beyond the farm gate.

1. On Farm. A clean environment is a gift the civil commons can offer to the world. Within the farm gate, people can contribute to this gift in a number of ways. They can create the civil commons by practising environmental stewardship with respect to the land, water and woods. They can also foster a sense of environmental responsibility that others begin to emulate until it becomes a community ethos, and cultivate an environmental consciousness through transformative learning. They can maintain the civil commons by following organic certification rules, municipal bylaws banning cosmetic pesticide use or local ordinances on waste management. They can also donate to public stocks of seeds for seed sharing. And finally, through their work, they can create a sense of beauty that others can enjoy.

2. Off Farm. Beyond the farm gate, people can join a clean-energy co-operative, participate in roadside tree planting and contribute to the restoration of native plants. They can also initiate beautification or greening programs, and build the civil commons through supporting greenbelt legislation, the Kyoto Agreement and GMO-free zones. They can become members of civil-commons organizations, like Greenpeace, Sierra Legal Defence or the Riverkeepers. And they can work to build a local economy, in order to avoid the environmental problems associated with the increased transport of the export economy, such as the intensification of cross-border trucking, air pollution, noise, highways, air-ports, harbours and warehouses, fragmentation and destruction of habitats, and accidents during transport (Goldsmith, 1997).

Social Aspects

Overall, social sustainability is comprised of three main elements: commitment to fair and just labour practices, gender equality and the preservation of rural communities and culture (Clark, 2006). The social aspects of sustainability include such civil commons areas as gender, race/ethnicity and class equity, minimum wages, union organizing, volunteer work, food banks, communal kitchens and public celebrations. How does this apply to horticulture?

Allen and Sachs (1992) provide a glimpse of what the social aspects of sustainable horticulture would entail when they present their vision of sustainable agriculture:

> *Provision of adequate amounts of healthy food and fiber for everyone who requires it, with production for need, not only for effective demand; non-exploitative relations in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and species; and equal access to decision-making for those involved in all aspects of the food and agricultural system.*

For horticulture to be sustainable in the social sense, it would need to build the civil commons both within and beyond the farm gate.

1. On Farm. Two areas of the civil commons highlight some of the possibilities for making horticulture socially sustainable within the farm gate: gender and labour issues.

Farming has traditionally been a highly patriarchal activity, and gender equity has been slow to make an appearance on many farms. In particular, conventional agriculture has been highly gendered, with male identity conflated with the role of farmer (Chiappe and Flora, 1998) and women usually confined to certain support tasks such as bookkeeping, running errands, and making and transporting meals for their spouses and workers (Hall and Mogyorody, 2002). For horticulture to be socially sustainable, it must do away with the gendered aspects of ownership labour and decision-making, and invite women to share equally in these vital areas of concern.

Farm labour represents another area where horticulture can become socially sustainable. The enactment of safe and respectful working conditions, minimum wages, and the freedom to form unions and collectively bargain would introduce the civil commons into horticulture, along with such other initiatives as land reform, food security programs and co-operative ownership of horticultural enterprises. Poincelot (2004) emphasizes this point when he argues that:

> *One problem that exists is that horticultural labour generally does not enjoy the accepted social standards and legal protections found in other fields of employment. If we are to accept the sustainable qualifier, sustainability is needed on all fronts, including labour conditions.*

Poincelot goes on to advocate for what is, in essence, the civil commons - policies and programs that protect and/or enable the ability of farm workers to access social life goods:

> *Policies and programs are clearly needed if sustainable farming systems are to provide employment that not only offers decent wages and health benefits, but also safe working conditions and social justice. To meet the latter goal, we must provide year-round labour and reasonable housing for migrant farm labourers.*

2. Off Farm. In the age of globalization, rural communities have become endangered habitats, failing as the natural resources around which they originally formed are being over-farmed, over-fished, over-logged and over-mined in a global grab for corporate profits. And as these communities fail, the social infrastructure collapses, unravelling in a vicious cycle of cumulative catastrophes. Two areas of the civil commons help to illustrate this point: public schools and public healthcare.

In the rush to implement a narrow meaning of efficiency that only translates as economically profitable, governments at all levels have been "rationalizing" the education system. For many rural communities, such structural adjustment has meant closing rural schools, in spite of the vital role they play in rural communities. Rural schools often house local cultural and political events, and serve as a physical resource for other activities (Lauzon and Leahy, 2000). A sustainable horticulture would play a vital part in the recovery of rural schools, as part of school/community/peace gardens, organic school lunch programs and environmental studies.

Driven by the same narrow ideology of efficiency, governments have also been closing hospitals, part of a long-term plan to create a crisis in publicly funded healthcare

systems that will make them ripe for privatization. For rural communities, this can contribute to the downward spiral of de-development, as access to healthcare is withdrawn. The rural hospital, as the centre of rural healthcare, is "not just vital to the health of individuals within the community, but is vital to the economic, social and environmental health and well-being of the community as a whole" (Lauzon and Hagglund, 1998). According to McMurtry (1998), public healthcare for all people of a society without barriers of social caste or market cost is a major institution of a developed civil commons. Sustainable horticulture would contribute to this development by providing such civil commons services as horticultural therapy, medicinal herbs and a clean environment that does not poison community members.

Economic Aspects

The economic aspects of sustainability cover such civil commons areas as co-operatives, credit unions, community currencies, fair trade, barter and sharing, and regulations to protect national currencies from the ravages of predatory speculation.

Around the world, resource and manufacturing industries are pulling out of rural communities in a frenzied hunt for the location with the lowest wages, working standards and environmental protections. Desperate attempts to revive these communities, by attracting either rootless transnational corporations with no allegiance to place or restless tourists looking for a pre-packaged entertainment experience, have little hope of producing long-lasting stability. In the words of Epp and Whitson (2001), "the countryside ... is coming to serve two new and very different purposes - playground and dumping ground - as the traditional rural economy declines." Becoming a playground for wealthy urbanites or a toxic waste site does little for the aspirations of those who live in rural communities.

For horticulture to be sustainable in the economic sense, it would need to build the civil commons both within and beyond the farm gate.

1. On Farm. Within the farm gate, people can be active members of producers co-operative or initiate profit-sharing. In addition, they can advocate for transparent supply chains, so people learn just how much the farmer earns, compared to the middleman and the retailer. They can also participate in fair-trade programs, which not only ensure a fair price for farmers, but also build the civil commons through the fair-trade requirement of operating as a co-operative and constructing local civil-commons infrastructure such as schools and health clinics.

2. Off Farm. As rural economies fail under the unrelenting pressures of globalization, it is time to seriously consider the problems associated with the global market. According to sociologist Gordon Laxer (2003), "the global market is the arena for transnationals, business professionals and the rich, where power is based on unequal command of property." There is no room in this arena for small- and medium-sized producers who must face the structured inequalities of the global market alone. They are doomed to bankruptcy, takeover or collapse. There is also no room for the civil commons, and the universal benefits that it can bring to both rural and urban communities. It is time to develop the local economy, not beg in the global economy, and develop the civil-commons infrastructure that can be gradually taken to the global level.

Sustainable horticulture has a vital role to play in a local economy those partners with the civil commons. Creating and maintaining farmers' markets, establishing producers' co-operatives, supporting credit unions and participating in local currencies are all examples where horticulture can build the civil commons and become sustainable. Coalitions and alliances between such communities can, in turn, establish economically viable regions, which become models for other areas in the country and the world. These regions would have the experience and the collective power to encourage a change at national and global levels, and become part of what has been termed "sustainable globalization" (Sumner, 2005), where the civil commons is globalized, not the rights of transnational corporations and currency speculators.

Overall, sustainable horticulture is much more than a production method or even a distribution channel. Poincelot (2004) understands this when he maintains that:

Sustainable horticulture is also not just a set of practices to be adopted, but instead is a system that includes the individual farms, the local ecosystems, and the communities connected to these farms from the local to the global context.

Horticulture has a clear role to play in the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability, contributing to the civil commons and reviving rural communities around the world. How does organic horticulture fit into this scenario?

ORGANIC HORTICULTURE

Is organic horticulture a form of sustainable horticulture? The question opens up a set of tensions that are illustrated by looking at organic agriculture. While Lampkin (1994) argues that "sustainability lies at the heart of organic agriculture," Guthman (2004) warns that organic farming in a place like California is farther away from sustainability than many people might think. In fact, the main purpose of Guthman's book "is to explain how organic farming has replicated what it set out to oppose".

From these tensions, it is clear that organic horticulture is not automatically sustainable horticulture, even if we don't use the civil commons as the organizing principle of sustainability. But it certainly has the potential to be sustainable, as a look at the range of meanings of the term organic agriculture will illustrate.

Quoting from an early definition put forward by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the American branch of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA, 2003) describes organic agriculture as "an *agricultural system* that promotes environmentally, socially, and economically sound production of food, fiber, timber, etc." Likewise, the Codex Alimentarious Commission defines organic agriculture as "a *holistic production management system* which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity" (RAFI-USA, 2003). From these perspectives, organic agriculture is merely a production system.

But the definition can expand to include humans, as shown by the Canadian General Standards Board (1999), which defines organic agriculture as "a holistic system of production designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the agroecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock and people." And a definition of organics from the early 1990s ends up being the most encompassing:

Organic farming comprises a range of approaches within the broader sustainable agriculture spectrum. In its most developed form, ecologically sustainable agriculture (including organic farming) is both a philosophy and a system of farming. It is based on a set of values that reflect an awareness of both ecological and social realities, and on a level of empowerment that is sufficient to generate responsible action (Hill and MacRae, 1992).

This definition shifts organic agriculture from being merely a 'system of farming' to include a philosophy based on a set of values. Although it does not incorporate the civil commons, this definition can be considered a forerunner of truly sustainable agriculture and horticulture - a hint of what they can become when their organizing principle is the civil commons, and they are based on life values, not money values.

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) (2006) is moving in this direction. After more than a year of public consultation, it has published four principles of organic agriculture, which would apply to organic horticulture as well: the principle of health, the principle of ecology, the principle of fairness and the principle of care. These principles provide a philosophical base and contain the seeds of the civil commons, not only as a whole, but also in particular areas. Among other things, they advocate for ecosystem health, protection of the common environment, civil-commons institutions such as equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, codes of animal care, socially and ecologically just resource management, open, equitable and accountable systems of production, distribution and trade, and the precautionary principle.

These four principles are an exceptional advancement beyond production to the wider environmental, social and economic realms of sustainability, and lay the groundwork for an even more advanced understanding of sustainable horticulture centred on the principle of the civil commons. Would such a form of horticulture contribute to rural development?

SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is another one of those hotly contested terms that brings to mind images of picture-postcard farms and quaint rural communities. Unfortunately, the reality often entails Wal-Marts, boarded up local businesses and suburban sprawl. Part of this dissonance between image and reality lies in the word "development" itself.

Development as Economic Growth

Since the development paradigm became popular in the last half of the twentieth century, it has been linked to economic growth. Growth, as development, is promoted by supranational institutions like the World Bank, by national and municipal governments, and by local chambers of commerce. Anyone opposed to economic growth is dismissed as being against progress or afraid of change.

This growth ethic has been studied for over 25 years by sociologist Harvey Molotch (1976, 1999). Working from a political-economy perspective, Molotch developed the concept of the growth machine to describe how place can be used by elites to transfer public wealth to private control. He emphasized that "land, 'the very stuff of place,' is a market commodity providing wealth and power, and that some very important people consequently take a keen interest in it" (1976).

These important people band together to form what Molotch called a growth-machine coalition to advance their financial interests by promoting an ideology that advocates growth as the key to future happiness, well-being and employment. Harvey (1989) describes the growth-machine coalition as "the local chamber of commerce, some cabal of local financiers, industrialists and merchants, or some 'roundtable' of business leaders and real estate and property developers." Bridger and Harp (1990) moved Molotch's concept of the growth machine to the local level and found that:

> *The local elites who most vigorously promote growth are those most likely to reap the benefits ... [they] typically operate by attempting to use government to gain those resources which enhance the growth potential of the locality.*

At the local level, critical examination of the impacts of economic growth for private wealth accumulation is precluded by a barrage of boosterism and the marginalization of those who oppose the growth imperative. Far from producing future happiness, well-being and employment, Molotch's (1976) research revealed that growth often ends up benefiting only a small proportion of local residents.

> *Taking all the evidence together, it is certainly a rather conservative statement to make that under many circumstances growth is a liability financially and in quality of life for the majority of local residents. Under such circumstances, local growth is a transfer of quality of life and wealth from the local general public to a certain segment of the local elite.*

The Development Potential

Molotch's research shows how economic growth for private wealth accumulation can be a liability, not an asset, in many communities. For this reason, such growth needs to be separated from development, so we can understand what development can really mean. Herman E. Daly (1990), former senior economist with the World Bank, differentiates between growth and development when he argues that:

> *To grow means 'to increase naturally in size by the addition of material through assimilation and accretion.' To develop means 'to expand or realize the potentialities of - that is, to bring gradually to a fuller, greater, or better state.' In*

short, growth is quantitative increase in physical scale, while development is qualitative improvement or unfolding of potentialities.

From this perspective, economic growth for private wealth accumulation is not synonymous with development. Molotch's research makes it clear that while growth occurred in many communities, development did not. At the individual level, there was little or no expansion or realization of potentialities for the majority of people, but just the opposite - a narrowing or elimination of possibilities as their quality of life and wealth were eroded by the actions of the growth-machine coalition. At the community level, public wealth, such as clean water, green spaces and personal security, was degraded or turned over to private control. All in all, happiness, well-being and employment were diminished by the growth imperative.

Development that reflects Daly's perspective would look very different from the growth-driven forms of development we are familiar with, including structural adjustment programs imposed on both developed and developing countries that benefit the global growth-machine coalition. This alternative form of development would look to life improvement, not GDP increases, as the measure of success. Such development would promote well-being in its fullest sense, as "the state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community)" (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). Erich Fromm (1967) clearly understood this full sense of well-being when, almost forty years ago, he maintained that well-being means to be fully born, to become what one potentially is. In this way, well-being - both individual and collective - links with Daly's understanding of development as the unfolding of potentialities.

Rural Development

Taking development out of the hands of the growth-machine coalition opens up the opportunity for rural development that is not based on economic growth for private wealth accumulation, but on enhancing the well-being of everyone in the community, and of the environment itself. Far from being the narrowly defined vehicle for private enrichment promoted by the growth-machine coalition,

Rural development as a concept, a field of practice and a policy field, is virtually boundless, encompassing complex issues and open systems conditions around the health of the biophysical environment, culture and heritage, the economy and livelihood, physical infrastructure, social provision and a host of other considerations, including governance structures and systems (Douglas, 2005).

Following Daly's perspective on development, rural development would look very different from examples of growth-driven development. It would be more in line with Eade's (1997) understanding of development:

Development is about women and men becoming empowered to bring about positive changes in their lives; about personal growth together with public action; about both the process and the outcome of challenging poverty, oppression, and discrimination; and about the realisation of human potential through social and economic justice. Above all, it is about the process of transforming lives, and transforming societies.

Sustainable Horticulture and Rural Development

Given the possibilities already laid out in this paper, how can the civil-commons orientation of sustainable horticulture meet the open-ended potential of rural development?

In the age of globalization, the future of rural communities is severely compromised by the economic, social, political, cultural, gendered and environmental impacts of the dominant form of globalization - corporate globalization (Sumner, 2005). Most meanings of sustainability are incapable of addressing these impacts and providing a firm

foundation for meeting the perils that corporate globalization creates. Joining the meaning of sustainability with the concept of the civil commons not only helps to counter the impacts of corporate globalization, but also opens up the promise of what can be understood as a truly sustainable development.

Following the understandings of sustainability and sustainable horticulture, sustainable rural development would involve a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons in rural communities. In other words, if it did not build the civil commons, it would not be sustainable rural development. In this way, sustainable horticulture can be seen as a complement to sustainable rural development, contributing to building the civil commons through horticulture. The off-farm examples of the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable horticulture described earlier in this paper are all examples of sustainable horticulture as a form of sustainable rural development. The possibilities are endless when you look at sustainability from a civil-commons orientation, opening up the potential for more sustainable ways of life not only intergenerationally, but also intragenerationally. Instead of the World Commission on Environment and Development's (1987) seriously inadequate description of *Our Common Future*, this paper proposes our future as a commons (Visvanathan, 1991) - the civil commons - with sustainable horticulture as a flagship for the kind of rural development that entails public wealth accumulation.

CONCLUSIONS

In his book, Poincelot (2004) urges us to move toward a more sustainable horticulture, in spite of the difficulties:

> *Reaching the goal of horticultural sustainability is not easy. It is even questionable whether a completely sustainable horticulture is possible, given limitations on some technologies and resources. Still, it is desirable to work toward a more sustainable or almost completely sustainable system, both in terms of a better environment and for future generations, that they too may eat well and affordably.*

For horticulture, including organic horticulture, to become sustainable and complement sustainable rural development, it must maintain a philosophical base and build the environmental, social and economic aspects of the civil commons. If it simply remains within the mechanistic confines of a production system, then it has little chance of contributing to either sustainability or rural development. But if horticulture meets the criteria set out for sustainability, both within and beyond the farm gate, then it will be well on its way to being a leader in the sustainability movement and a driver of rural development.

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