

# The L.I.F.E. Strategy

Locally Integrated Food & Energy

**building a sustainable regional food system now**  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, August 2007

The L.I.F.E. strategy is a grassroots initiative to mobilize concerned citizens in communities into region-wide networks to feed us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—a century already swept into climate change, peak oil, degenerative disease epidemics, ideological extremism, and war. At this time, few leaders are thinking ahead of this curve of climax and calamity. Fewer still understand and respect Earth's natural systems and ecology. Citizens themselves must take action to prepare for these inevitable, immanent changes. Yet, while many citizens recognize our peril and its urgent call for changes, our situation is so immense, complex and beyond human control, few have a vision and responsibility large enough to address our challenges.

For 30 years, the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) planted and nurtured seeds for regional farming and food systems all across the Northeast. Those seeds grew into strong, community-connected networks of growers, distributors, suppliers, customers, and services that demonstrate methods, lifestyles and social structures of a new kind of food system.

Now is our time to accelerate those networks' evolution into full scale, integrated, sustainable, renewable, regional food systems.

L.I.F.E.—Locally Integrated Food Economy—is citizens in rebuilding regional food systems from the bottom up as inter-connected, self-sustaining community farming and food system infrastructures. L.I.F.E. will assure our region's capability to feed our communities and families in impending decades of change and challenge.

A Task Force for L.I.F.E. must pursue five specific, fundamental initiatives:

- 1) **Farmland Conservation:** Farming's first need is fertile, tillable land. To protect and steward this most precious resource is a highest priority, and previous efforts fell short of the mark. Regional Farmland Trust Funds can be established to acquire key farmlands, and sustainably manage these resources as public demonstrations of effective ecological stewardship.
- 2) **Sustainable Soil Fertility:** Soil management is the fundamental strategy of sustainable farming, and should steadily increase fertility. A primary pressing challenge is to renew our agricultural soils and sustain their fertility and productivity before oil reaches \$100 a barrel, which nearly occurred in the last year. Natural materials and methods are available to enhance soil fertility with sea products, stone dusts, composted organic wastes, microbial treatments, new and traditional management practices.
- 3) **Youth Vocational Training:** After soil, our most precious resource is growers—people with knowledge, commitment and experience to grow food. To feed the Northeast in this new century will need tremendously more farmers, farm businesses and farm families. Young people must be recruited into farm careers, given effective training in sustainable agriculture, supported to acquire land, equipment and other resources to begin farming, and assured fair access to regional markets.
- 4) **Farm-to-Market Infrastructure:** Elaborate infrastructures of organizations, corporations, trucking, warehouses, processing plants, public policies, and more must be designed, built and connected to deliver locally-grown food to regional markets. Small farm cooperatives increase capabilities to wash, process, package, store, and truck farm products to urban markets. Networks of warehouses and trucking must handle and move farm products to market. Barriers to regional marketing of local foods must be reduced.
- 5) **Customer Education to Regional, Seasonal Foods:** Consumers, restaurants and food services need guidance to become aware of new food choices, and to change their culinary choices and menu selections to incorporate and emphasize regional, seasonal foods. Education and health care institutions are keys to deliver this new food awareness and dietary style.

The L.I.F.E. strategy is much bigger than NOFA, and requires participation by more than growers. Many other partners and players in the regional food system must be engaged in this initiative. However, as growers and producers, NOFA has a special duty to call regional food communities together to begin this initiative. And we must begin in earnest, because global ecological changes are urgent for our next generation's future.

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