

Letter to a Young Farmer: How to Live Richly without Wealth on the New Garden Farm

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This engaging, conversational book dispenses life advice for farmers and others who seek to live close to the earth.

*Letter to a Young Farmer *is an accumulation of wisdom with a large dollop of humor and a conversational tone that will endear it to almost every audience. The book recalls a conversation with a parent or older family member in that many of its common-sense directives are informed by experience, from the purchasing of land to the management of aggressive rams. But not all the advice here is specific to farmers or “garden farmers”; general life advice can be extrapolated from discussions of love, finance, and other common-sense aspects of life.

Categorizing *Letter *is tricky at times, perhaps appropriately so, stating that “contrary farmers,” as the author self-identifies, tend to defy stereotyping. It is philosophical, but it also dispenses concrete advice. Likewise, though it does present useful information, much of this is apocryphal, cast in a slyly humorous way, and even opinionated. For example, the author agrees that climate change is a problem, but he also describes people concerned over the issue as paranoid “hand-wringers.”

*Letter *is best read as an inspirational piece. It seems likely to lure many a gardening neophyte to the farm life, though it takes care to stress the difficulty of this path too. Above all, it preaches consistency, locality, and the long view, occasionally contrasting this philosophy with the frantic pace of mainstream modern life. In the book’s worldview, small farming is the key to solving the most serious of our environmental, mental, and physical problems as well as the existential emptiness of consumerism. Yet at the same time, it does not advocate complete abandonment of capitalist modality. Parts of the book recall Buddhist principles of moderation.

With its unique point of view, *Letter to a Young Farmer *is a must-read piece of environmental, agricultural, and social philosophy.

ANNA CALL (May/June 2017)

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