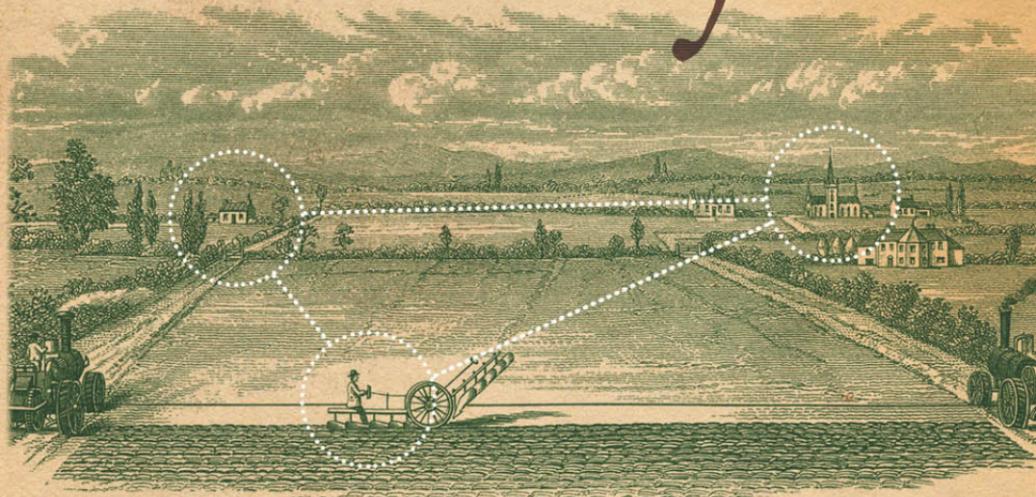


Organic Wesley



A Christian Perspective
on Food, Farming, and Faith

William C.
Guerrant Jr.

Foreword by Matthew Sleeth

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on Food, Farming, and Faith

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 seedbed

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SOW FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

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Foreword

JOHN WESLEY WAS a giant of a man. He continues to cast his long shadow of influence across the world. Ten preachers of today could not fill his shoes. I remember the first time I met him, in the form of his life-sized statue. He stood staring upward with a Bible in his raised hand. I stepped up to him to say hello, and noticed that I was quite a bit taller. He was five-foot-three. Weighing less than one hundred and thirty pounds, he was as lean as a jockey. Wesley might not be surprised at our greater height today, but what about our girth?

I recently learned about a casket that is almost as wide as Wesley was tall. It's called "the Goliath", and it's a whopping four and a half feet wide. A few decades ago when the company started making this supersized casket, they sold one a year. Today they ship one out every four or five days. Cemeteries accommodate the Goliath by selling double-wide grave sites.

How did our waists get to be the size of giants? What happened to our diets, habits, and food to make the change that resulted in this growth? How does the change affect our souls? What would Wesley say? What would he do?

You hold the answer in your hands. Farmer, theologian, and Wesleyan author Bill Guerrant has been searching out the answers to these questions. His answers in *Organic Wesley* are a satisfying feast.

Bill examines the current state of our diet and agriculture, as well as Wesley's thoughts on consumption, food sources, and the treatment of animals in agriculture. We in the church will be richer for following along as his investigation unfolds. He starts with a survey of the current situation of our waistlines and where our food comes from. We learn that there are twice as many prisoners in America as there are farmers. He presents us with an engaging portrait of Wesley, the thought leader, who is as lively and challenging today as he was to his contemporaries.

I am particularly glad that Bill has thought through what Wesley would *not* be happy about in the current local and organic food movement. Bill warns about the narcissism that can come from worrying only about ourselves. In so doing, he heeds Christ's warning that we take no thought of what we eat and drink, realizing that life is more than meat and raiment. In the truest sense of Wesley, he keeps ever in mind that we should first seek the kingdom of God, and then all the others things of life fall into place.

Many in the church today would be hard-pressed to articulate a biblical ethic on food. But think about the number of times food shows up in the scriptures. When Eve saw that the fruit was "good for food" and couldn't control her appetite, humanity fell from paradise. Esau lost his inheritance because he thought with his stomach instead of his head. The Hebrew people on the Sinai Peninsula were willing to trade their newly won emancipation for the fleshpots of Egypt. Eli couldn't control his appetite or his son's, and fell off a wall like Humpty Dumpty and couldn't be put back together again.

Jesus fed thousands on the mountain and taught during supper for five chapters in the book of John.

He could turn water into wine, but he resisted Satan's tempting all-you-can-eat buffet in the wilderness and set a standard for temperance.

Ten years ago, when I first dug into what Wesley had to say about health and eating, I found it a challenge. I had not paid attention to my diet, and my waist showed it. Since then, I have adopted several habits to take better care of my soul and my body. I have eaten hundreds, even thousands, of meals with others. When I'm at a restaurant with a friend, I suggest that we split a meal, even if they order something I don't particularly like. It is far more important to share a meal than to feed my wants. I learned to see that I was not practicing the temperance which is a hallmark of a Christian, and cut back on soft drinks and snacking. The result is more fellowship and less thinking about myself—and I weigh forty pounds less!

The Bible says that in heaven the Tree of Life will yield fruit in every month and that all the nations will be healed. Paul cries out in an eternal joy and optimism, "Yet in this body will I see him!" It is difficult to picture standing in front of our Lord in a body that required a Goliath-sized coffin. Gluttony, lust, greed, and sloth are deadly sins. Tending the temple of our bodies with the food we eat is part of the serious business of being a Christian.

I am thrilled that Bill Guerrant wrote *Organic Wesley*. It is essential reading not only for those who admire John Wesley, but also for everyone who hungers for soul food.

Matthew Sleeth, MD
Author and executive director, Blessed Earth

Preface and Acknowledgments

AS I WAS nearing the end of my seminary studies, the time came for me to choose a topic for my thesis. After considering and abandoning several possibilities, I eventually settled on the idea of exploring what John Wesley and his followers had to say about creation care. I tentatively titled my project “The Environmental Ethic of John Wesley and the Early Methodists,” and I commenced my research in earnest.

I soon discovered two things that dampened my enthusiasm. First, Wesley and the early Methodists had very little to say about what we now call “environmentalism,” as it simply was not part of eighteenth-century public dialogue. Further, it seemed to me that whatever little evidence there was of an environmental ethic in Wesley’s thoughts and writings had already been thoroughly mined by others. There just didn’t seem to be anything else to say.

But along the way I discovered something else that both fascinated and delighted me. Scattered throughout Wesley’s sermons, letters, journals, books, and pamphlets—spanning his life and touching upon every aspect of his ministry—were repeated and passionate arguments and exhortations relating to food and ethical eating. I recognized themes in his thoughts and teachings that were very familiar to me.

Not long after enrolling in seminary I had stepped away from a busy and thriving law practice to return home to my family farm in Virginia. My wife and I decided to trade our professional urban lifestyles for a life spent raising goats, pigs, chickens, and organically grown vegetables. Inspired by writers and farmers like Wendell Berry, Michael Pollan, and Joel Salatin, we became full-time farmers, tending a small, chemical-free farm and trying to replicate for our customers and ourselves the food experience of a diversified family farm of a century ago. We had become producers in what is now loosely known as “the food movement,” a phenomenon reflected in the surging interest throughout our culture in food produced naturally and sustainably.

To my surprise, in my research I found the same principles and ideals that were fueling this movement deeply embedded in the thoughts and teachings of John Wesley. Just as the food movement emphasizes the importance of nutritious food and a healthy diet, the humane treatment of animals, ethical food production, and opposition to overconsumption, so did John Wesley.

Despite being a lifelong Methodist, a student at a Wesleyan seminary, and now a full-time committed proponent of the food movement, I had never heard this before. As far as I could tell, Wesley simply was not a part of this conversation, even among the Methodists and Wesleyans at the forefront of the food movement. I discovered that, to the best of my knowledge, no one had ever comprehensively examined Wesley’s food ethic, and certainly no one had ever made the connection between that ethic and our ongoing cultural conversation about food.

So I tossed out my work on Wesley’s environmental ethics and started over, instead examining how Wesley’s thoughts and teachings resonate with the

guiding principles of the contemporary food movement. The thesis that emerged out of that work later evolved into this book. My hope is that it will help introduce a Wesleyan food ethic into the current conversation.

I am grateful to the many people who have provided me with invaluable help, inspiration, and guidance along the way. A few of them deserve special note. My thesis advisors at Asbury Theological Seminary were Dr. James Thobaben and Dr. Laurence Wood. My studies under Dr. Thobaben helped inspire the topic, and Dr. Wood was especially helpful in encouraging me to pursue publication of my work. Both of them offered advice and suggestions that have improved this book. I did not always accept their suggestions, however, so any remaining errors of fact or judgment are mine alone.

Without the help of my assistant (and friend) Valarie Taylor I'm not sure this book would have been possible. I am much obliged to her.

Finally, I am thankful for the support and encouragement of my wife and partner, Cherie, without whom this journey would never have begun.

Introduction

FOOD IS A hot topic these days. Over the past few years, interest in the sources and quality of our food has exploded. Farmers' markets, crowded with shoppers, are popping up all over the country in response to increasing demand for fresh, locally grown food. Organic food is the fastest-growing segment of the food market. A string of popular documentaries and best-selling books also attest to our culture's surging interest in food. Advocates of healthy and natural food have been propelled from virtual obscurity into celebrity status. There is even an organic garden at the White House.

"Americans today are having a national conversation about food and agriculture that it would have been impossible to imagine even a few short years ago," wrote Michael Pollan in his introduction to Wendell Berry's *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food*.¹ This increasing cultural attention to food and food ethics is sometimes called the "food movement," and it has arisen, in large part, as a reaction to concerns generated by the modern industrialized food system. While people are drawn to this movement for a variety of reasons, there are some consistent themes. Advocates of the food movement:

- favor a diet of natural, whole, unprocessed foods, and attribute the increasingly troubling worldwide health crisis (particularly the obesity epidemic) to

the industrial system's preference for processed and nonnutritious food,

- generally favor organically produced food over food produced in the chemical-based industrial system,
- generally oppose consuming meat, milk, and eggs from animals raised in "factory farm" concentrated animal feeding operations, preferring instead the products of animals raised more naturally, and
- prefer local community-based food economies, and generally disfavor the globalized industrialized food distribution system, complaining that it provides poorer quality food and is destructive of communities and the environment.

This book examines the intersection of the teachings of John Wesley with the ethics of the contemporary food movement, an intersection whose existence is generally unknown both to Wesley's spiritual and ecclesiological descendants and to the advocates of the contemporary food movement. So where is John Wesley in this conversation? What might an eighteenth-century English evangelist have to contribute to a twenty-first-century conversation about food? And why should anything he might have to say matter?

Within Wesley's work, there is an identifiable ethic deeply sympathetic to core arguments of the contemporary food movement. Wesley speaks directly and compellingly to the movement's emphasis on nutritious food, reasonable levels of consumption, and the humane treatment of farm animals. It is also possible to identify within Wesley's thoughts and work compelling arguments consistent with the food movement's preference for localized organic food production. If John Wesley were alive today, he would no doubt be a passionate and energetic

ally of the food movement. And from his teachings, writings, and example, it is possible to discern and articulate a Wesleyan food ethic that can inform and benefit his spiritual descendants in today's food movement.

The book begins with a review of the contemporary food system—specifically, the rise of the industrial food system and the countervailing food movement it has generated. Then, after first briefly reviewing Wesley's life, and in particular those influences and events that shaped his food ethic, this book considers what his works reveal about his views on five of the principal themes of the contemporary food movement. These themes are:

- an insistence on nutritious food (and avoidance of food that is health-impairing),
- an advocacy of reasonable levels of consumption and avoidance of overeating,
- a desire for the humane treatment of farm animals,
- a preference for naturally raised, organic food, and
- a preference for localized community-based food production.

After examining where Wesley's teachings would locate him within the food movement (as well as the objections he might have to the movement), I will identify and suggest a specifically Wesleyan food ethic, relevant to our ongoing cultural conversation about food.

I expect many people will be surprised to discover how important food ethics were to John Wesley, and how central they once were to Wesleyan communities. My hope is that this Wesleyan food ethic will be rediscovered and returned to the place it once occupied in Wesleyan thought.

1

The Rise of Industrial Agriculture and the Emergence of the Food Movement

[In America] diseases are indeed exceeding few; nor do they often occur, by reason of their continual exercise, and (till of late) universal temperance.

—JOHN WESLEY

A Primitive Physic, 1747

Today, one in three adults is considered clinically obese, along with one in five kids, and 24 million Americans are afflicted by type 2 diabetes, often caused by poor diet, with another 79 million people having pre-diabetes. Even gout, a painful form of arthritis once known as “the rich man’s disease” for its associations with gluttony, now afflicts eight million Americans.

—MICHAEL MOSS

“The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food,” 2013

TO UNDERSTAND AND appreciate how a Wesleyan food ethic might speak to our culture, we must first examine our prevailing food system. What are we eating? Why are we eating it? How is our food produced and distributed? What are the criticisms of the existing food system and why are they being made? As Wendell Berry famously

put it, "Eating is an agricultural act." In order to best understand the issues we face when choosing our food, we need to have some basic understanding of our agricultural systems. So, to answer these questions, we will begin with a look at the current industrial food system and the countervailing food movement that has arisen in response to it. Although this story is told, in part, with statistics, try not to be put off by that. We will be returning to Mr. Wesley soon.

The Rise of Industrial Agriculture¹

Agriculture seventy-five years ago was not much different from the agriculture of John Wesley's day. Most Americans lived on farms, where they tended gardens, saved seeds, and likely kept a milk cow, a few hogs, and a small flock of chickens. On farms such as these, families produced nearly all of their own food, usually also raising a cash crop to obtain the money needed to buy the things they were unable to produce for themselves. Food consumed in cities and urban communities came largely from the small farms in the surrounding rural areas.

In the years following World War II, however, American agriculture began to change dramatically, through what came to be known as the "green revolution." Increased mechanization decreased the necessity for human labor on farms and enabled farms to become ever larger. As mechanization increased, America's transition from a rural to an urban nation accelerated. Today, only about 15 percent of Americans live in rural areas, the lowest percentage ever. And these days few Americans raise or grow any of their own food. Whereas in 1945 approximately 30 percent of Americans were farmers and the average farm was 195 acres, today less

than 1 percent of Americans claim farming as their occupation, and most cropland is on farms with more than 1,000 acres. Even among those Americans who still live in rural areas, 90 percent of them are not farmers. There are now twice as many Americans in prison as there are farming.

Over the past seventy-five years, mechanization, along with the use of pesticides, herbicides, and inorganic synthetic fertilizers, has caused crop yields to skyrocket. In 2013, for example, the average amount of corn produced per acre in America was twice that of just forty years earlier and more than four and a half times greater than the yield in 1945. Yields increased even more dramatically with the development of genetically modified seed. In the mid-1990s Monsanto Company introduced proprietary corn and soybean seeds whose DNA had been genetically modified to be resistant to its herbicide Roundup (glyphosate), thus enabling farmers to spray the herbicide directly on emerging crops, killing all vegetation but the crop plant. Monsanto also developed and introduced seeds genetically modified to include a pesticide in their DNA. Known as GMOs (genetically modified organisms) these crops rapidly came to dominate American agriculture. Virtually nonexistent before 1996, GMOs took agriculture by storm. By 2013, nearly all the soybeans, corn, and sugar beets grown in the United States were genetically modified. GMO products soon became ubiquitous in processed food. All told, 60 to 70 percent of the processed food sold in the United States contains at least one genetically modified ingredient.

These technological advances have also sharply reduced the number of farmers necessary to produce the crops. Today 89 percent of America's food production comes from fewer than 350,000 farmers (.001 percent of

the population), a level of production that required more than 6 million farmers in the 1930s. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, 66 percent of U.S. agricultural output comes from a mere 4 percent of American farms.

The abundance of corn and soy resulting from the commodification and industrialization of agriculture has contributed to steep increases in the production of processed food, in which corn and soy by-products are usually primary ingredients. Generally speaking, processed foods are food items that could not be prepared in a household kitchen using the same ingredients, but rather require industrial techniques and chemical formulations and additives. Approximately 70 percent of the American diet is processed food, which is now cheap and abundant.

Just as industrialization and technological advances were changing vegetable and cereal grain production, animal-based agriculture was undergoing dramatic changes as well. Small-scale animal husbandry increasingly gave way to large industrialized concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs), often referred to as “factory farms,” which have essentially replaced the small family farm as the source of the nation’s meat, milk, and eggs. In 1900, 95 percent of American farms had chickens; today less than 1 percent do. Likewise, 80 percent of American farms had milk cows, whereas today only 8 percent do, and nearly half of those are on farms with more than fifteen hundred cows and \$1 million in annual sales.

The high-intensity CAFO structures on the factory farms have greatly reduced the amount of space necessary to raise animals, permitting farms to produce vastly more animals than they were able to raise when the animals lived outside and ranged pasture. Hogs are now commonly raised in large, industrial-scale, corporate-owned buildings,

housing thousands of animals at a time. Egg-laying hens are kept in buildings that typically house about 125,000 birds each. Broilers (meat chickens) are also raised in concentrated indoor operations. A typical thirty-thousand-square-foot broiler production facility holds 37,000 to 46,000 chickens at a time, with well under one square foot of space allotted to each of them. A few decades ago it would take nearly four months for a chicken to reach slaughter size, but now, thanks to hybridization and specialized feed, they reach slaughter weight in only six to seven weeks.

The animals in the CAFOs are fed specially formulated feed, produced primarily from the GMO corn and soy grown on the large, industrialized, monocultural farms. To stimulate growth and to combat the disease that occurs in such concentrated confined operations, animals are also typically given low levels of antibiotics with their feed. Approximately 80 percent of the antibiotics used in the United States are fed to farm animals.

In the industrial system, beef cattle are taken off pasture and finished (raised to slaughter weight) in high-density feed lots, where they are given antibiotics and fed a diet of predominantly GMO corn and soy. Most beef cattle are also given hormonal growth promotants (HGP), typically implanted in their ears, to stimulate rapid growth.

Dairy farms have also seen dramatic change. As recently as 1975 the average American dairy farm milked 25 cows. Today there are 135 cows on the average dairy farm (with large dairies typically having from 5,000 to 15,000 cows) and that number continues to rise. A mere 3 percent of American dairies now produce more than 50 percent of America's milk. Milk production has skyrocketed as well. In 1950 the average dairy cow produced

about 5,300 pounds of milk per year. By 1965 production had increased to more than 8,300 pounds per cow. Today, amazingly, the average is close to 22,000 pounds of milk per cow, about four times more than the production of a generation earlier.

By employing these concentrated, high-intensity practices, and by integrating their operations with those of industrialized commodity agriculture, American animal-based agriculture has been able to produce meat, milk, and eggs in abundance, while keeping costs low. As one study summarizes it:

Livestock farming has undergone a significant transformation in the past few decades. Production has shifted from smaller, family-owned farms to large farms that often have corporate contracts. Most meat and dairy products now are produced on large farms with single species buildings or open-air pens. Modern farms have also become much more efficient. Since 1960, milk production has doubled, meat production has tripled, and egg production has quadrupled. Improvements to animal breeding, mechanical innovations, and the introduction of specially formulated feeds and animal pharmaceuticals have all increased the efficiency and productivity of animal agriculture. It also takes much less time to raise a fully grown animal. For example, in 1920, a chicken took approximately 16 weeks to reach 2.2 lbs., whereas now they can reach 5 lbs. in 7 weeks.

New technologies have allowed farmers to reduce costs, which mean bigger profits on less land and capital. The current agricultural system rewards larger farms with lower costs, which results

in greater profit and more incentive to increase farm size.²

The traditional diversified family farm is simply no longer representative of American agriculture. In the words of agricultural historian Paul Conkin:

Narrowly specialized, large-scale farming departs widely from most images of the traditional family farm. In what sense does a 10,000-acre wheat farm in Kansas fit any definition of a family farm, when machines do all the planting and harvesting and the operator does not even live on the farm? Or what about a family-owned chicken farm with 20,000 broilers or 2,000 laying hens all housed in one-square-foot stacked cages in a large coop or barn, with no direct contact between the owner and the chickens? Or the 18,000 hog farmers who produce more than 90 percent of the total product, or the 11,000 beef cattle owners with annual sales over \$1 million who market just over half our beef?³

Further, this highly specialized industrial food system is increasingly dominated by a handful of powerful multinational corporations. In his book *Deep Economy*, published in 2007, Bill McKibben reported,

Four companies slaughter 81 percent of American beef. Cargill, Inc., controls 45 percent of the globe's grain trade, while its competitor Archer Daniels Midland controls another 30 percent. . . . Eighty-nine percent of American chickens are produced under contract to big companies, usually in broiler houses up to 500 feet long holding thirty thousand

or more birds. Four multinational companies control 70 percent of milk sales in the United States. . . . Five companies control 75 percent of the global seed market. . . . Walmart is now the largest seller of food in this country (and on the planet).⁴

The efficiencies of these large industrial operations enable them to operate on much smaller profit margins than small farms could afford, increasingly rendering small traditional family farms economically nonviable. McKibben reports, "Farmers' profit margins dropped from 35 percent in 1950 to 9 percent today. . . . To generate the same income as it did in 1950 a farm today would need to be roughly four times as large."⁵

As production has increased, so has the ability to distribute food quickly and over great distances. Gone are the days when a city's food needs would be met by the small farms surrounding that city. Now, with much of the formerly rural farming communities having been transformed into suburbs, there is a vast food distribution apparatus in place, which stocks American supermarket shelves with food originating on farms often thousands of miles away. This distribution network has rendered the seasonality of food largely irrelevant. In any town in America it is possible to buy produce without regard to whether it is in season locally: asparagus from Peru, blueberries from Costa Rica, and tomatoes from Mexico are common. Even when certain vegetables are in season in a particular area, the vegetables sold in that area's stores are usually not locally grown. On average, the food on an American plate these days has traveled fifteen hundred miles or more to get there.

Because of the distances involved and the time between harvest and consumption, traditionally favored heirloom vegetable varieties have been replaced with

those varieties best suited for transportation, uniformity of appearance, and long shelf life. Likewise, traditional heritage breeds of farm animals have been replaced with those best suited to (and most profitable within) the factory farm/CAFO system.

This industrialization of agriculture has been welcomed as a means of liberating millions of Americans from the drudgery of farm life and has filled grocers' shelves with cheap and abundant food. Never in world history has food been as abundantly available, and at such low prices, as it is in America today. Americans spend on average less than 10 percent of their income on food, down from nearly 30 percent in 1950 and 17 percent only thirty years ago. Industrialized agriculture has made food shortages, at least in this country, a thing of the past.

Yet even as the industrialized food system has become more pervasive and more dominant, some have expressed opposition to its methods and consequences. The early critics were lonely voices, often dismissed as romantics or Luddites. The achievements of the industrialized food system, represented by steep increases in yields and supermarket shelves filled with an impressive variety of low-cost foods, were undeniable. The modern food system seemed to be personified in scientists, chemists, commodity traders, and biological engineers, rather than in a farmer and his mule. Objections to the booming industrial food system were written off as either nostalgic sentimentality, or as ignorance of the benefits of scientific progress.

The Emergence of the Food Movement

But over time a greater reaction to the dominant industrial system began to emerge, as a wider audience began to

take more seriously the complaints being lodged against it. Among the critics and resisters were:

- people who preferred whole natural foods to processed foods,
- people who objected to the extensive use of chemicals, GMOs, and toxins on the industrialized farms,
- people who preferred supporting neighboring small farmers over buying their food from large corporations,
- people who preferred to obtain their meat, milk, and eggs from farms where the animals were pasture-raised using more traditional practices and without the extensive use of hormones and antibiotics,
- people concerned about the environmental damage done by industrial farming,
- people concerned about the adverse health consequences of eating food produced by the industrial system,
- people whose faith draws them to prefer food produced in more natural and traditional ways, and
- people who simply prefer the taste of fresh, traditional varieties of locally produced food.

What is the Food Movement?

This unorganized and multifaceted opposition to the industrial system is what I will call the “food movement.” Sometimes called the “farm-to-table movement,” the “local food movement,” and the “organic” or “natural food movement,” but most often not labeled as a movement at all, it is a phenomenon easily recognized in our culture, in everything from the rising popularity of farmers’ markets to the proliferation of specialty, organic-themed grocery stores. It is reflected in our cultural groundswell

of interest in food and the ethics of eating. Of course, this movement is not a formal organization per se, and most of its participants would not consider themselves part of a “movement.” But whatever we call it, it exists and people are being increasingly drawn to it.

Because there is no single motive that animates those who are part of this movement, it resists precise definition. Those who fall under the food movement umbrella would include organic family-farmers, of course, but also backyard gardeners, foodies, locavores, patrons of farmers markets and specialty grocery stores (such as Whole Foods and Trader Joes), and everyone in between. They’re a diverse lot, united by concerns over the quality of their food, the healthiness of their diets, and the ethical implications of their food choices. Whether their opposition is grounded in issues of personal health and well-being, the environment, animal welfare, public health, or some combination thereof, they generally oppose or, at the very least, are distrustful of the prevailing industrial food system. They are attracted to the food movement by a desire for food that is safe, nutritious, tasty, locally grown, and produced under humane and environmentally sensitive conditions, and by a corresponding belief that the industrial system does not produce such food.

Initially limited to a few marginalized health food advocates and early proponents of organic agriculture, over the past fifteen years or so the ranks of the movement have swelled; it has achieved mainstream acceptance, and its popularity is accelerating. Of course, there is nothing new about a desire for safe, tasty, nutritious, locally grown food. Farmers’ markets have existed for as long as humans have been practicing agriculture, and since at least the time of Hippocrates we have understood that a good diet

is essential to good health. And as recently as a couple of generations ago, of course, all food was organic. This food movement must be understood, therefore, not as something new, but rather as a reaction to the rise of the industrial food system and the damage it is perceived to have caused.

As this food movement has grown, organic agriculture and organic food have emerged as widely available alternatives to industrial agriculture and industrially produced food. Sales of organic food, defined as food produced without the use of pesticides, herbicides, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified seed, antibiotics, or growth hormones, while still comprising only approximately 4 percent of the total food market, have nearly quintupled over the last ten years.

The rise of the food movement has also been accompanied by a steep increase in the popularity of locally produced food. The number of farmers' markets in America has increased by 76 percent since 2008, and direct sales from farmers to consumers have grown by more 700 percent since 2005.

Concern over the national health crisis that has followed in the wake of increased consumption of industrially produced food has also contributed to the rising popularity of the food movement. As the American diet changed from predominantly seasonal produce and locally raised meat to largely processed food, high in fats and sugars, an epidemic of obesity, diabetes, and related illnesses has followed. The rapid onset of widespread obesity is particularly shocking. According to the USDA, Americans consume nearly 500 calories per day more than they did in the 1970s, and those over age twenty are now nearly three times more likely to be obese than they were just thirty years ago.

Over the past three decades, childhood obesity has nearly tripled. The Centers for Disease Control warns that type 2 diabetes, which was until recently unknown in children and was commonly called “adult-onset” diabetes, is now a “sizable and growing problem among U.S. children and adolescents,” for which the obesity epidemic may be “significantly responsible.”

As Walter Willet, chair of the nutrition program at Harvard’s School of Public Health, puts it,

The transition of food to being an industrial product really has been a fundamental problem. First the actual processing has stripped away the nutritional value of the food. Most of the grains have been converted to starches. We have sugar in concentrated form, and many of the fats have been concentrated and then, worst of all, hydrogenated, which creates trans-fatty acids with very adverse effects on health.⁶

Writing in *New York Times Magazine*, Michael Moss noted,

Today, one in three adults is considered clinically obese, along with one in five kids, and 24 million Americans are afflicted by type 2 diabetes, often caused by poor diet, with another 79 million people having pre-diabetes. Even gout, a painful form of arthritis once known as ‘the rich man’s disease’ for its associations with gluttony, now afflicts eight million Americans.⁷

The shocking and dramatic rise in these diseases is linked directly to our diets, which have come to be dominated by unhealthy processed foods. In his book *Food Rules*, Michael Pollan wrote:

Populations that eat a so-called Western diet—generally defined as a diet consisting of lots of processed foods and meat, lots of added fat and sugar, lots of refined grains, lots of everything except vegetables, fruits, and whole grains—invariably suffer from high rates of the so-called Western diseases: obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Virtually all of the obesity and type 2 diabetes, 80 percent of the cardiovascular disease, and more than a third of all cancers can be linked to this diet. Four of the top ten killers in America are chronic diseases linked to this diet.⁸

The CDC estimates that an amazing 75 percent of U.S. health care spending goes to treat chronic diseases linked to our diets.⁹ Alarming statistics such as these have led many people to turn to the food movement in search of healthier, more nutritious food.

The food movement has also attracted those who oppose the industrial meat animal system, or factory farm CAFO system. Many within the food movement have elected to eat meat, if at all, only if it comes from animals raised in humane, traditional ways, and without the use of the growth hormones and antibiotics that are now common in industrial meat production. Thus, they prefer products from pasture-raised animals, such as grass-fed beef, pastured pork, and free-range chickens.

The growing popularity of the food movement is being reflected in popular culture as well. Best-selling books from authors such as Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver promote nutritious, natural, and locally grown food, while drawing attention to the problems associated with industrial agriculture.¹⁰ Poet, novelist, essayist, and farmer Wendell Berry has been producing critiques of the

industrial food system for decades, until recently laboring largely in obscurity. These days he is rightly regarded as a principal founder of the food movement, and his work has begun to receive broad cultural acceptance and praise. In 2010, Berry was awarded the Presidential National Humanities Medal, and in 2012 he was selected to deliver the prestigious Jefferson Lecture for the Humanities, the highest honor the federal government confers for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities.

Documentaries such as *Food, Inc.* (2009), which received an Academy Award nomination for best documentary, have reached wide audiences. Virginia farmer Joel Salatin, a longtime outspoken advocate of the food movement and opponent of industrial agriculture, was featured in *Food, Inc.* and in Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*; and he has become a much sought-after speaker and a food-movement celebrity. First lady Michelle Obama has made the fight against childhood obesity one of her principal causes, and in 2009 she oversaw the creation of an organic garden on the White House grounds. In August 2014, the U.S. Postal Service introduced a special set of farmers' market stamps, declaring that "Farmers markets are an old idea that's new again." The Food Network, a cable television channel devoted entirely to food programming, is now a top-ten cable channel with more than one million viewers daily. Clearly, these days the food movement is vibrant, robust, and growing.

The Christian Response to the Movement

Although the food movement is predominantly secular, the values and ethics that have fueled its rise have resonated with Christians and within Christian communities.

Just as there is now broad Christian participation within the environmental movement, Christians are increasingly visible within the food movement as well. Some of its leading advocates, such as Joel Salatin and Wendell Berry, cite their Christian faith as an essential foundation of their beliefs. Motivated by an ethic of creation care, many Christians have come to see participation in the food movement as one way to be better stewards of creation. For many Christians, the choice of what to eat, and in what quantity, is not a morally or spiritually neutral decision.

Christians who have embraced the food movement often ground their participation in Scripture, citing obligations to tend and preserve the earth, to treat animals with compassion, to nourish and care for our bodies, and to help the poor and the hungry. For many believers, honoring and respecting creation is an essential part of honoring and respecting the Creator. They believe that eating well and maintaining good health contributes to a healthy overall relationship with God and with creation. Many also advocate local food systems as a way to invigorate and preserve local community-based economies and to help reduce the use of environmentally damaging fossil fuels. Numerous denominations and faith-based organizations have also joined in opposing the inhumane and unnatural treatment of animals in the CAFO system. Of course Christians have also been drawn to the movement by the deteriorating state of health in contemporary society, believing there is an obligation to God to tend properly and carefully to our bodies. The proliferation of church-based community gardens also has its roots in the food movement, and is often connected to efforts to deliver higher-quality, more nutritious food to the poor and food-insecure. The movement, and the broader call

within the Christian community to an ethic of creation care, has been particularly attractive to younger evangelicals, seemingly put off by culture wars and more interested in finding ways to make a positive contribution to the world's well-being.

Unquestionably the food movement is vital and increasingly popular. It is now manifested across American culture, both secular and religious.

Now let us begin to look at the food ethics of John Wesley and how they speak to the motives and concerns driving the food movement. We will start with an overview of Wesley's life and ministry, focusing on the emergence of his food ethics.

For Discussion

1. In what ways has the food system changed over your lifetime? Have those changes improved our quality of life? Are there ways these changes have diminished our quality of life?
2. Think of your last few meals. Do you know where the food you ate was grown or raised? By whom it was raised? Do you know what ingredients the food contained? Were the meals eaten at home with your family? Were any of them eaten in your car?
3. Think of people you know who are healthy and fit. What kind of diet do they eat? Now think of people who are unhealthy and unfit. What is their general diet?
4. Think of a meal you ate at your grandparents' home when you were a child. How did it differ from typical meals of today? How did the food taste compared to your last family meal?
5. Are there ethical/moral issues associated with what and how we eat? What potential moral issues come to mind when you think about food?

2

John Wesley

He who governed the world before I was born shall take care of it when I am dead. My part is to improve the present moment.

—JOHN WESLEY

Letter to Mr. John Smith (Archbishop Thomas Secker),
March 25, 1747

Do good. Do all the good thou canst.

—JOHN WESLEY

“On Worldly Folly,” 1790

JUST AS WE need to understand the context of our current food system to best appreciate how a Wesleyan food ethic might speak to it, it is likewise important to understand Wesley’s food ethics in the overall context of his life and ministry. Before looking specifically at how his teachings on food and ethical eating intersect with the food issues faced by our culture, let us first begin with a review of Wesley’s life and a consideration of the sources and origins of his teachings on food.

Wesley’s Life and Legacy

John Wesley was the fifteenth of nineteen children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley, nine of whom survived infancy. Born in 1703 in Epworth, England, Wesley grew

Notes

Introduction

1. Wendell Berry, *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), x.

Chapter 1

1. Beginning with this section and continuing throughout the book, numerous agricultural and health data are presented without citations to avoid an overabundance of endnotes. The data comes primarily from the following four sources:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov

USDA Economic Research Services: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications>

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service:
<http://www.nass.usda.gov/>

USDA National Conservation Research Service:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

2. Carrie Hirbar, *Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities* (Bowling Green, OH: National Association of Local Boards of Health, 2010), 1; http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/docs/understanding_cafos_nalboh.pdf.
3. Paul Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture Since 1929* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 152.

4. Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Times Books, 2007), 52–53.
5. *Ibid.*, 54–55.
6. Quoted in Michael Moss, *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (New York: Random House, 2013), xvii.
7. Michael Moss, “The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 20, 2013.
8. Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (London: Penguin, 2009), xii–xiv. See also Melanie Warner, *Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Foods Took Over the American Meal* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 66–67, for a discussion of some of the findings of research examining the link.
9. Ellen Gustafson, *We the Eaters: If We Change Dinner We Can Change the World* (New York: Rodale, 2014), xv.
10. See, for example, Michael Pollan, *Food Rules*; Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: The Natural History of Four Meals* (London: Penguin, 2006); Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2008); and Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). These are among the best known, but there are many other popular titles with similar themes.

Chapter 2

1. Wesley's sermons, journals, and other writings are now extensively available, both online and in print. My principal source for Wesley's writings was the Baker Book House's 1986 reprint of the 1872 edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd, ed. edited by Thomas Jackson, originally issued by the Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London. I also used the resources

available at Northwest Nazarene University's Wesley Center Online (<http://wesley.nnu.edu/>), where much of Wesley's work is collected, as well as materials available in the online resources of the B. L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary and in the online resources of the library of the Duke Divinity School. To avoid cluttering the book with endnotes, citations to the Wesley source documents are only provided when the context does not make the source evident.

2. William Abraham, "Wesley as Preacher," *Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 98.
3. For more on Cheyne's life and background, see H. Newton Malony, "John Wesley's Primitive Physick," *Journal of Health Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1996), 150.
4. George Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen: Together with Five Discourses, Medical, Moral, and Philosophical: Serving to Illustrate the Principles and Theory of Philosophical Medicine, and Point Out Some of Its Moral Consequences* (London: printed for C. Rivington and J. Leake, Bath, 1740), lxviii. Eighteenth-century English writers were notoriously inconsistent in their use of punctuation and capitalization. Throughout this book, in order to make some of the language more intelligible and easier to read, I have sometimes modified it by using the appropriate punctuation and capitalization.
5. He added, "But what epicure will ever regard it? For the man 'talks against good eating and drinking!'" Journal entry, February 12, 1742, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:363.
6. See Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 30; and Malony, "John Wesley's Primitive Physick," 150–51.

- See also, "A Second Letter to the Reverend Dr. Fee," Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:506 ("It was from an ancient sect of Physicians, who we were supposed to resemble in our regular diet and exercise, that we were originally styled 'Methodists'").
7. See Randy Maddox, "Reclaiming the Eccentric Parent," in *Inward and Outward Health: John Wesley's Holistic Concept of Medical Science, the Environment and Holy Living*, ed. Deborah Madden (London: Epworth, 2008), 16–17; and Randy Maddox, "Celebrating the Whole Wesley: A Legacy for Contemporary Wesleyans," *Methodist History* 43, no. 2 (2005), 85: "Wesley longed for Christians to see that participation in God's present work of holistic salvation includes nurturing not only our souls, but our bodies, and addressing both of these dimensions in our outreach to others."
 8. "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," (1748), Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:264.
 9. Randy Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing" *Methodist History* 46, no. 1 (2007): 18. *A Primitive Physic* is also frequently cited herein. Although early editions of the book were titled *A Primitive Physick*, for consistency, I use only the spelling "Physic," unless the context requires the use of the other spelling.
 10. Maddox, "Reclaiming the Eccentric Parent," in *Inward and Outward Health*, 19. By comparison, William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769) sold for six shillings. Deborah Madden, "Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing" in *Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Maddox and Vickers, 182.
 11. Letter to Mr. Merryweather, January 24, 1760, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Jackson, 12:269.
 12. David Stewart, "John Wesley, The Physician," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 4, no.1 (1969): 35–36; Madden, "Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing," 184. See also Deborah Madden, *A Cheap and Safe Natural*

Medicine: Religion, Medicine and Culture in John Wesley's Primitive Physick (New York: Rodopi, 2007).

Chapter 3

1. Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2008), 1.
2. Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (London: Penguin, 2009), xii–iv.
3. "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VII," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Jackson, 5:359.
4. H. Newton Malony, "John Wesley's Primitive Physick," *Journal of Health Psychology* 1, no.2 (1996), 150.
5. "A Word to an Unhappy Woman," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Jackson, 11:172.
6. "The General Spread of the Gospel," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Jackson, 6:288. For an extended examination of Wesley's eschatological views in his later years, see Randy Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory," in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood, 2004).
7. Margaret Flowers, "A Wesleyan Theology of Environmental Stewardship" in *Inward and Outward*, ed. Madden, 73.
8. "God has . . . entrusted us with our bodies (those exquisitely wrought machines, so 'fearfully and wonderfully made') with all the powers and members thereof. He has entrusted us with the organs of sense; of sight, hearing, and the rest: But none of these are given us as our own, to be employed according to our own will. None of these are lent us in such a sense as to leave us at liberty to use them as we please for a season. No: We have received them on these very terms,—that, as long as they abide with us, we should employ them all in that very manner, and no other, which he appoints." "The Good Steward," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Jackson, 6:138.