



Cathryn Wellner's search for 1001 reasons for optimism

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BUSINESS, EDUCATION, FOOD

#841 Young Agrarians plow path for new generation of farmers

November 4, 2013

Today is Blog4Peace day and around the world people are joining the BlogBlast for Peace. I decided to write about something close to my heart—food—and the young people who are throwing their intelligence and passion into growing high quality food for us. Food security is essential to peace. Today I salute these young people and all the other farmers who put the earth first as they work so hard to keep us fed.

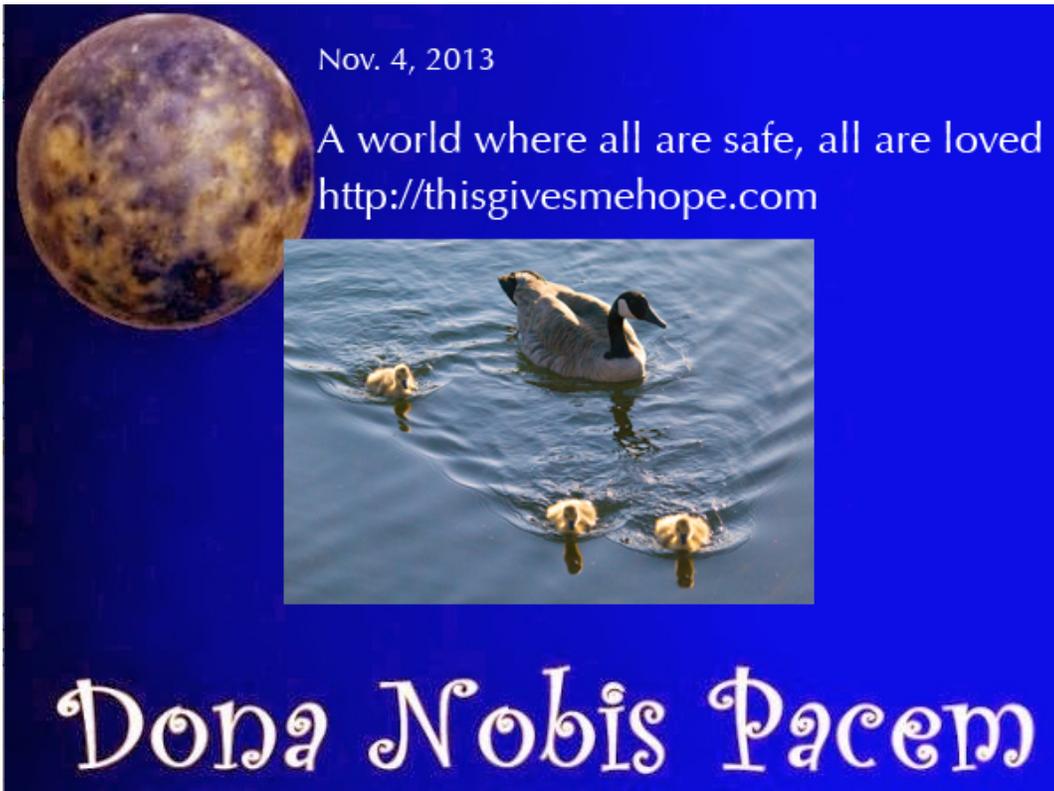
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WHERE'S ALL THIS HOPE COMING FROM? CHECK OUT THE PIN TRAIL!



CATHRYN'S BLOGS

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Meet Canada's Young Agrarians

Visual notes from a Vancouver Urban Farm Society Forum; photo from Young Agrarians Facebook page

With the average age of [Canadian farmers](#) inching upward, the need to attract a new generation of farmers is urgent. Inspired by [The Greenhorns](#) in the States, [Young Agrarians](#) have partnered with [FarmFolk CityFolk](#) to “celebrate, connect and recruit young farmers.”

That can't happen too soon. Although we all like to tuck into good food on a daily basis and can fool ourselves that supermarket bounty means an endless supply, at the field end of things the picture is not so rosy. Take a look at a few statistics from the [2011 Census of Canadian Agriculture](#):

- 48.3% of farm operators are 55 or older (versus 32.1% in 1991)
- Only 8.2% of farm operators are under 35, down from 9.1% in 2006 and 19.9% in 1991
- Farm expenses (excluding depreciation) eat up an average of 83 cents of every dollar in receipts

Just getting in the farming game is enormously expensive. Being close to major cities (or right in them, for urban farmers) increases the odds of a good return, but that is where land prices are highest. Factor in machinery, tools, seed, livestock and all the other related costs, and the chances of even sticking a foot in the door drop dramatically for young people drawn to a career on the land.

Still, [Alfons Weersink](#), a professor at the University of Guelph's Food, Agricultural & Resource Economics division, told CBC:

Over the last half dozen years, just the profitability and the financial rewards have increased ... there's more than just the magnetic pull now that's attracting people, I think....

It's also a very exciting sector to be involved in. I think a couple of generations ago it was just pure physical work that determined who was successful. Now ... boy, you have to be a marketer, you have to be human resource manager, you have to be computer savvy. There are a number of skills required, and I think that's attractive.

Young people with an interest in becoming farmers need the kind of resources and networking Young Agrarians are making available. They host [potlucks](#) around British Columbia to give young farmers a chance to get together and share skills. Instead of speed dating, they do weed dating, with some romantic

results, some partnership results and a whole lot of laughter. (Watch the [Greenhorns video](#) to get the idea.)

On the [Young Agrarians](#) Web site, you will find an interactive map of farm resources, events, a [land access guide](#), a blog with information on such things as apprentices, opportunities and skill sharing, and a whole lot more. Bubbling under it all is a sense of energy and optimism. It gives me hope for all the eager young farmers whose dreams will feed us.

You can follow [Young Agrarians](#) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Flickr](#).

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