

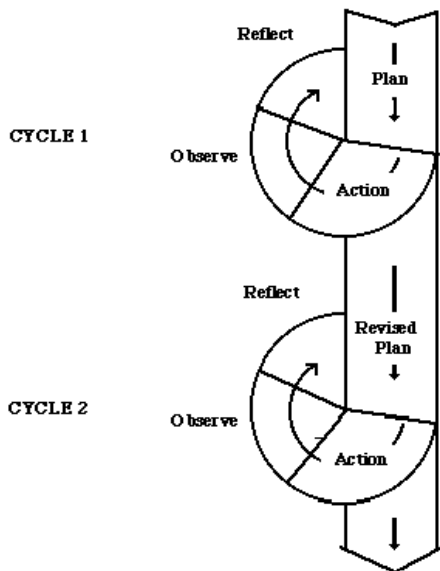
We Make Our Road By Walking: CSA's as a Movement for Nonviolent Liberation

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Thank you for allowing me to be a part of today's activities and thank you for this opportunity to share together with you today. I have been involved in starting CSA's in three countries Canada, the US and in Japan over the past 20 years. I have been given the task, based upon my experience, to explore two questions with you today. One, is there some universal experience that leads people to start CSA's? Secondly, are there different educational and organizing methods used in starting CSA's in various cultural settings?

Regarding the first question, it appears to me that modernity in its latest and perhaps last guise as neo-liberal globalization is coming to an end. When epochs fail it is those on the margins who feel the first evidence. Failure is experienced as injustice, violence, hunger, lack of access to clean water, hopelessness, and despair. Three alternatives exist: armed revolution, self-destruction, or a channeling of communal psychic energy to create a new way of living--an expression of hope. Those in the centers of power are often the last to find out that the system they believe in is finished. Social location affects not only what we see but it also influences what we are capable of doing. Peasants, artisans, indigenous people do not possess economic or military power but they do have the power to change their own lives. They possess the power to stop cooperating with unjust systems and to create communities of caring. It is a power rooted in nonviolence. I believe that the CSA movement would be well served by learning the lessons of nonviolent social change movements.

To the second question, regarding educational and organizing methods I would say that there are different ways in which people learn. Thus it is important to use different kinds of educational methods to reach people and to build social solidarity. The work that I am involved in could be called by a number of different names, participatory research, action research, education for liberation, or emancipatory research all of which is, in essence, “learning by doing” or simply community based problem solving.



Overview of Action Research Methodology

http://www.web.net/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html#_Toc26184669

In Canada

Context

What was I facing? In 1991 the world market price for wheat collapsed when the US dumped its wheat reserve on the market. Many farmers on the Canadian Prairies

went bankrupt and lost their farms. The stress led to an increase in domestic violence, alcoholism and suicides. I worked for a Christian church organization and was given the task by my advisory committee to do something. Crisis counselling was not an option. I was introduced to Paulo Friere's, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and other works on community organizing and began to do workshops in both Winnipeg and in small towns in Manitoba to try to uncover what are the forces involved in causing hardship and what can be done to begin to make a difference.

I used the following process:

- I began with my own analysis of what I saw happening in agriculture
- I gave the group an opportunity to reflect on their own experience and express their own perspectives
- We then began to reflect together what is it that is causing the problems that we observe around us. Are the problems structural, legal, ideological, technological, political, ecological.
- What can we begin to do about the problems we identify? The problems inevitably were identified as being structural in nature and thus the way to address structural problems was through working together to make a different structure based upon community solidarity
- What is keeping us personally from acting? The last question made the issue personal. Building a good society requires citizen participation.

Research and education was done together with the participants. There was no sense of me being an objective outside observer. I felt it important that I be involved in taking risks in changing my life as much as I was expecting other to make changes in theirs. The goal was to address real problems faced by the people and to build solidarity.

What issues did we identify?

1. Farm debt associated with land purchases. Difficulties associated with debts incurred with intergenerational land transfer.
2. Access to just and fair markets. Under this category we worked to establish a CSA in Winnipeg.
3. A need to find farming methods that are more economically and ecologically sound (the terms 'organic' or 'traditional farming methods' were not used because of the biases against those terms by 'conventional' farmers).

Devising a plan to start a CSA

1. I invited a group of people who had expressed interest in healthy food and healthy economies, sustainable cities, local currency. Some academics, some journalists, mostly citizens and two farmers.
2. Critique the present system. Why isn't it working?
3. How would a local food system address those problems?
4. I was a co-organizer/facilitator/spokesperson for the group with the pilot project farmer. Keep to the message. The system is failing. Together we are doing something new. The goal is to create a culture of caring.
5. Create a newsworthy event. We prepared a "Made in Manitoba Meal" for a winnable audience and gave a presentation after the meal about the problems confronting us and the new project we propose. Invite a sympathetic journalist.
6. Continue spreading the idea through workshops, press releases, as guest speaker at clubs and organizations.
7. **Popularize the word so that it becomes a part of the vocabulary of society**
8. Recruit good farmers who are also capable in speaking with the media.
9. Run a pilot project and record your learnings so that others can learn and apply in starting new projects.
10. Newsletters and communication
11. End of year banquet and evaluation to reflect on experience and begin anew.
12. There was no government involvement until the project proved to be a success. Then the government wanted to help in sponsoring the program.

Japanese experience

I used the following process:

1. Presentation on the problems of industrial agriculture led families in the Mennonite Churches of Sapporo to invest in starting Menno Village.
2. Since the “farm crisis” was not readily understood and group analysis was not common in Japan I started farming and began to model a CSA.
3. Practice hospitality
4. Invite a small group of young people to begin to work together and live together
5. Gave presentations to consumer groups, farmers, clubs, organizations, universities
6. Wrote newsletters for our weekly vegetable delivery
7. Participated in opposing GM agricultural research in Hokkaido
8. Took more than five years for people to gain a good understanding of what we are doing.
9. Government people are reluctant to think of new economic thinking. Most Academic researchers are not interested in or capable of doing action research.

What are the issues we identified?

1. Land and machinery costs are extremely high
2. There can be as many as four or 5 layers of markets between the farm and city people’s table.
3. Cosmetic standards in Japan mean a lot of vegetables are considered to be waste (Mottainai)
4. Aging farm population and decline of rural communities
5. The threat of GM technology to seed sovereignty.
6. The land grab occurring in other countries to secure food as Japan’s agriculture continues to be dismantled.

What is a CSA?

1. It is not niche marketing or smart marketing as government policy makers or economists often say
2. CSA’s are a new beginning in the midst of the failing ideology and structure of market economics.
3. They are an attempt to create a culturally embedded economy of caring.

What have I learned from the two experiences that would be helpful for spreading CSA's in Japan?

1. Need a network organization to:
 - maintain the vision of CSA's
 - Source for CSA information
 - Network of farmer and citizen solidarity to shape policy
2. Need community organizers for:
 - Experiential education/training for new farmers in organic methods and CSA management.
 - Educating citizens on the impact of a failing industrial food economy.
 - Popularizing of the language of CSA and local agriculture in the media.
 - Critiquing government agricultural policies that favor large scale agriculture or 'food security through trade.'
3. Model projects: i.e. Community restaurant/ Neighborhood CSA drop-off site, farm group CSA project.

Conclusions:

1. CSA's in my experience have come into existence as a result of the failure of the existing system.
2. CSA's are a grassroots movement. They will not be started by government.
3. Community organizers/ action researchers are an absolute necessity. Conventional research and researchers, although they have a part to play, often times lack the commitment to participate in the process of social change.
4. Action research is committed to doing analysis that leads to action. A further reflective stage lead to corrections. The goal is the "beloved community", economies of caring, a nation at peace with itself, a more livable world.
5. The work is never complete. It involves planning, action, reflection leading once again to a refined action. It is a nonviolent alternative to the violence of industrial agriculture.

Community organizers, although not a well known in Japan, have an important role to play in facilitating change in Japanese agriculture. It is important that a well conceived strategy is thought out to create changes in Japan's food system through an

expanding network of grassroots initiatives and by suggesting positive steps that would help reorient Japan's agricultural policy, to the largest degree possible, in the direction of a more sustainable, resilient, safe locally based celebration of local culture.