



Organic **Connections**

JAN-FEB 2013

THE AWARD-WINNING MAGAZINE OF NATURAL VITALITY

ARRAN STEPHENS
FOLLOWING
NATURE'S PATH

ALEX BOGUSKY
CONSUMER REVOLUTION'S
FEARLESS ADVOCATE

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INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TOWN

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Are We Building Stress into Our Lives?

We certainly live in a fast-paced society. Most people would probably agree that the speed of today's "living" has something to do with the stresses most of us experience in our working lives and too often bring home with us.

Speed, it seems, is relative to itself. Letters carried over ground and water gave way to airmail. When the fax machine was introduced, days became minutes. Dedicated fax machines are now mostly scans attached to e-mails, and minutes have become seconds. Apparently not fast enough, e-mails have morphed into instant messages and iChats.

I now spend hours daily answering e-mails. Of course, it's true that I spend less time on the phone and I'm handling a greater volume of traffic. But this raises the question, where are we heading at such ever-increasing speed?

The Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* explains to Alice, "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

Are we losing something in the transaction of exchanging our present for a future toward which we need to race faster and faster?

One of the great things about taking a vacation in new surroundings and seeing the sights is that we focus on where we are. It's most often fun, and we come back possibly tired but certainly refreshed. But is it smart to race through fifty weeks in order to enjoy ourselves for the other two? Can we have some revitalization in our daily lives?

To answer this question, my wife and I decided to give the past and future a temporary rest and focus on our present environment. While we were driving, we enjoyed the fall foliage and noticed some trees with unique pods we hadn't seen before. It was some natural beauty we responded to. Later, we were cooking dinner and saw that the olive oil drizzled in the pan came out looking like a Chinese character. These little observations illustrate a simple point: there are things to see if you're looking.

I wonder what other beauty and magic our pre-mall-age children see that we are speeding by? Is our frenetic race toward ill-defined fulfillment in a nebulous future causing us to miss the *real* show?

What do *you* think?

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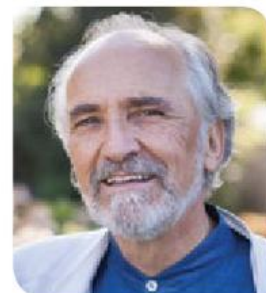
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Organic Connections magazine is an award-winning publication brought to you by Natural Vitality—a purpose-driven human nutrition company. Our core belief is that you can't be fully healthy in an unhealthy environment. We publish *Organic Connections* to help inspire and educate readers with profiles of people working to make our world healthier and more sustainable. To learn about Natural Vitality's broader mission and our Natural Revitalization environmental action initiative, visit www.naturalvitality.com.

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Pam Warhurst had a "completely mad" idea about how ordinary people could live their lives differently. She pitched her idea and the town bought it. The inspiring result is England's Incredible Edible Todmorden.



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Arran Stephens

Following Nature's Path

by Bruce Boyers



Arran Stephens and his wife, Ratana, started Nature's Path from the back of a restaurant in 1985. The family-owned company is now the largest organic cereal brand in North America, with products sold in 42 countries. Stephens has given giants such as Kellogg's and General Mills a serious run for their money and is every week besieged with offers to sell out to similar deep-pocket corporate shoppers. As he proclaims far and wide to anyone who asks, *that will never happen*; for despite his success, it has never been about profit. From the beginning, Stephens has had a spiritual dedication to the organic mission and to creating a company with soul that would carry its integrity intact for generations to come.

"I think we succeeded way beyond our wildest expectations," Stephens told *Organic Connections*. "Considering that what we do had the potential of being the norm someday in the world, I wanted to build our company's base—our strength—so that when the transition inevitably came, we would be strong enough to not get swept off our foundation."

An Organic—and Spiritual—Journey

Organic production was in Stephens' blood from day one. "The day I was born, my mom was unloading sacks of potatoes off the back of a truck," said Stephens. "She was a strong

lady. We had a 120-acre farm. Later we moved to another farm where my parents homesteaded, cleared a forest and created an 80-acre beautiful farm on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. It was a real life lesson on the farm, because we used to gather kelp from the ocean in the autumn and spread it on the field; that was our fertilizer. My father extensively mulched and even wrote a little book on it called *Sawdust Is My Slave*, all

metaphor for life and a guiding principle that underlies whatever we do at Nature's Path."

Not far up the road, Stephens' life mission was made manifest to him in a pivotal trip to India when he was 23 years old. "There are some of us who are not satisfied with material possessions," he explained. "I wanted much more out of my life and engaged in a lot of intense spiritual practice of meditation. I had a great teacher named Sant Kirpal [Sant

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the truth is within each one of us.
But it requires mentors, I think, to stimulate and awaken
that sleeping beauty that's within all of us.*

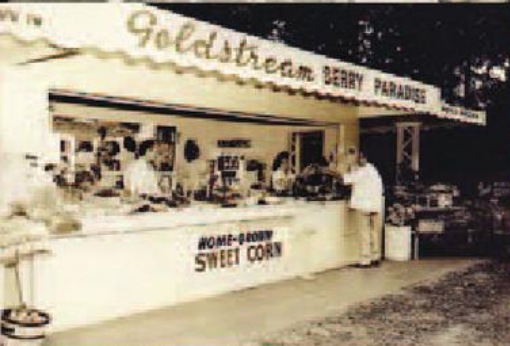
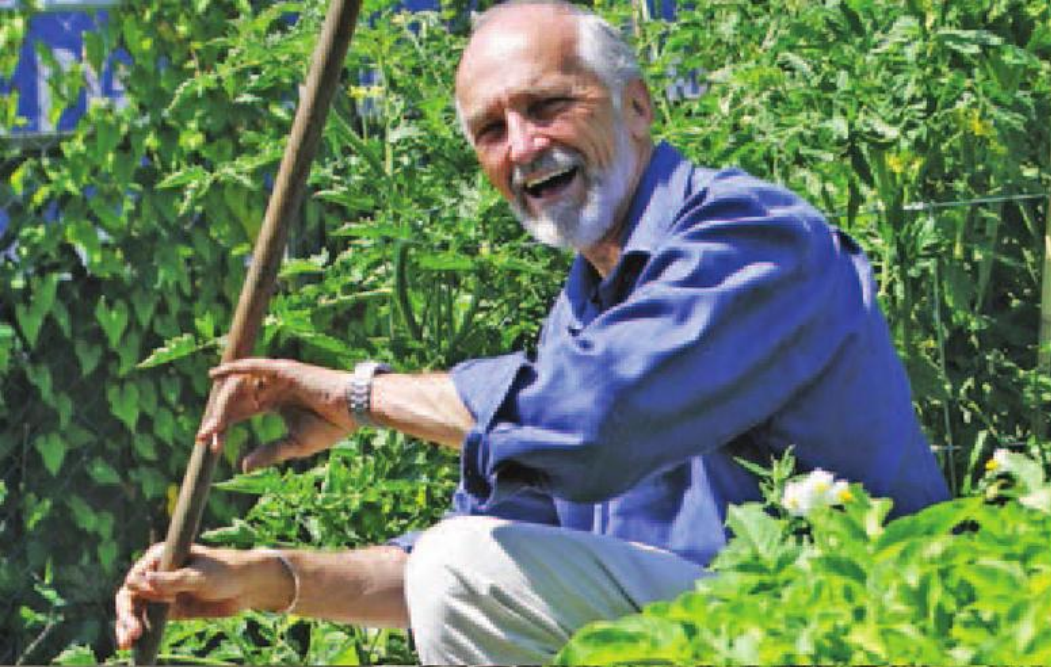
about his mulching procedures. When I was a boy he told me, 'Always leave the soil better than you found it.' That has become a



Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj], and I went and studied with him in India in 1967. He was very well known and respected all over India and throughout the world. He treated me like a son, and I regarded him as my father. I've had several great mentors in my life, but he was the first and foremost.

"The truth is not in India; the truth is not in the Himalayas: the truth is within each one of us. But it requires mentors, I think, to stimulate and awaken that sleeping beauty that's within all of us. I think each one of us has the capacity or capability to be an instrument. Like Saint Francis said, 'Let me become a channel of your peace. Where there is darkness, let me bring light. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is sadness, joy.' I felt that my job, my responsibility, was to act as a transformative catalyst when I got back to Canada."

Upon his arrival home from India, he started right in. "When I returned, I wanted to create a great livelihood," Stephens continued. "I had \$7 to my name and I convinced a



couple of people to loan me \$1,500. That was starting capital. I bought a failed restaurant and moved the equipment to a location in Vancouver that I thought would be really good and opened this little restaurant. It wasn't to make money; it was to fill a need. There were no vegetarian restaurants in Vancouver at that time. It was just the right thing at the right place at the right time, and customers began coming in droves. Pretty soon we opened Canada's first large natural food store."

The Lifestream Lesson

Prior to the success of Nature's Path, Stephens had another thriving organic products company called Lifestream. "Lifestream was a company that I started in 1971," he said. "Being undercapitalized I took on a couple of partners over the next three years, and by 1981 it was the largest natural foods company in Canada, and we had some export sales into the United States at the time."

But a conflict occurred between Stephens and his partners that resulted in the loss of the company. "A partnership problem came about in 1980 or 1981," Stephens recounted. "It got so bad that it became, 'You buy me out

or I buy you out—it's not working.' My partners didn't have the money to buy me out, and I wanted to buy them out but they wouldn't sell. So we were at an impasse. I refused to guarantee a loan from the bank until we could resolve this, and it forced the sale of the company in 1981."

Following that incident, Stephens and his wife continued on their own in Vancouver, operating two natural food restaurants. Four years later, out of the back of one of them, they began the company that would make its mark on the world: Nature's Path.

Nature's Path saw unprecedented success, and very interestingly Kraft, the corporation

that had purchased Lifestream, one day came back to Stephens. "Fourteen years after I sold Lifestream, we had beaten it in the marketplace with our little Nature's Path company," said Stephens. "I got this call one day from a Kraft lawyer, asking if I would be interested in buying my company back. I looked at it and said, 'It's losing money. Why should I buy it back?' The lawyer then asked if I wouldn't make an offer. I did so, and they said, 'It's worth five times that.' I said, 'Well, good luck. Go and sell it.' Six months later the lawyer returned and said, 'I'm representing Kraft again, and they're prepared to accept your offer.' I said, 'My offer has just

We were all very messianic about spreading the gospel of eating good food and regaining health. There was no "industry" when I started; I don't think that organic foods in 1967 were more than maybe a million dollars at most all over North America. It was a little cottage industry, mom and pop, with idealistic owners.



dropped.' So we actually ended up buying it back for the real estate assets. It didn't make sense to market two brands, so we folded Lifestream into Nature's Path and made Nature's Path a much stronger brand."

David and Goliath

The odds against his success have never been lost on Stephens—or on his sense of humor. "Not long after we started Nature's Path, I was at a trade show in California showing some products that we had experimented with," he related. "A TV interviewer with cameras in tow was at the show. He was going past us and didn't even notice our tiny little booth there. So I put the cereal in his face and said, 'Would you like to see some organic cereal?' He looked at it and looked at me, and the cameras were suddenly on me, and he asked, 'How can a little pipsqueak company like you ever hope to survive against the giants of Kellogg's and General Mills?' So I asked him back, 'Well, have you ever heard of David? Have you ever heard of Goliath?' That went all across California at the time. I've always had fun tweaking the noses of our much, much larger competition, thousands of times bigger than us. That hasn't stopped, and now they're taking notice."

Difference of Soul

Taking from the Lifestream example, it might be seen that there is a difference in ideals between the founders of natural products companies and the corporations that later purchase them. "The only way big corporations would help the forward stride of the natural products industry," Stephens said, "is if there were a top- and bottom-line profit and sales growth motive. The moment a company stopped growing or producing profits, they'd probably dump it."

Profit is often not a central driving force when natural products are developed—a prime example being the first item Stephens produced for Nature's Path. "The first product we developed in 1985 under the Nature's Path brand was called Manna Bread, made from sprouted organic grains," Stephens recalled. "It was based on an ancient Aramaic recipe attributed to the Essenes, a mystical Jewish sect that lived by the shores of the Dead Sea in the pre-Christian era. They left behind these wonderful scrolls, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which eventually found their way into the Vatican Library where they remained for the next 1,500 years or so and were translated.

"I was so inspired by them that I decided to try and make a product based upon the ancient recipe that was in these old scriptures. It described sprouting grain and grinding it and leaving it on hot rocks in the desert to bake. Then you make thin loaves of it, and you eat it like your forefathers did when they fled Egypt. They lived in the desert for 40 years.

"That's how it was in the beginning. We were all very messianic about spreading the gospel of eating good food and regaining health. There was no 'industry' when I started; I don't think that organic foods in 1967 were more than maybe a million dollars at most all over North America. It was a little cottage industry, mom and pop, with idealistic owners.

"Today it's a \$60 billion industry. Many of the people along the way maybe lost their ideals or maybe got enticed by the big dollars and they sold out. Then they were horrified to see what happened to their companies afterward. When you sell out a company, it's almost like the soul gets gutted from it."

This dissimilarity of view was also evident in the recent battle for California's Proposition 37—the Mandatory Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food Initiative. "The interesting thing is that a handful of dedicated companies supported consumers' right to know what's in their food," Stephens said. "Those big giant companies that own natural and organic brands—like Kellogg's, which owns Kashi, Morningstar Foods and Bare Naked; General Mills, which owns Cascadian and Larabar—dumped millions of dollars in trying to defeat the citizens' right to know what's in their food. For some reason they aligned with Monsanto, DuPont, Dow, Syngenta, Bayer and all these huge global chemical companies. It's rather amazing."

Remaining True

But Stephens himself has arranged it so that his company will never have this sort of experience. "I don't ever want to have that

happen to Nature's Path," he asserted. "I don't want somebody to close down a plant and dislocate a community simply because they want to shift it to some other location,

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That's the bottom line.
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PERIOD.

say, in the Midwest, to soak up the capacity of their plants. I want Nature's Path to remain true to its organic roots and the idealism on which it's based. My wife and I have been engaged in succession planning for the last few years; we've got our son and daughters involved in various aspects, as well as a professional management team. We currently have close to 500 employees.

"I get about 50 inquiries a year—at least one a week—from venture capital companies and those that are fronting for major international corporations that want to buy Nature's Path, but they end up in the round file. We're just not interested. We even say on our website, 'No part of Nature's Path is for sale.'

"I think what we all want is a better life, and a world that's habitable for our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. That's the bottom line. We want a safer, cleaner, healthier world. PERIOD." ■

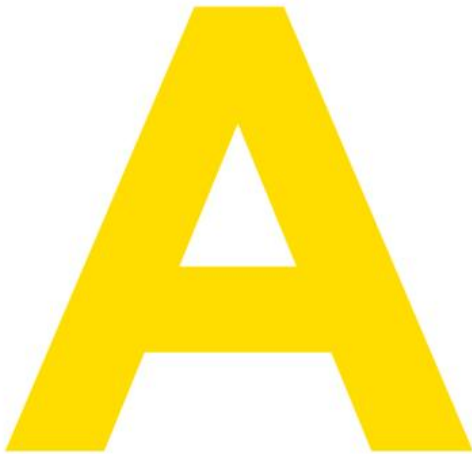
More information is available at
www.naturespath.com.



Alex Bogusky

Consumer Revolution's Fearless Advocate

by Bruce Boyers



Alex Bogusky once lived a life right out of a modern-day *Mad Men*. He was an advertising executive—a partner at the leading agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky—at the top of his game, with clients such as corporate giants Burger King, Coca-Cola (for Coke Zero) and VW, as well as being the creative mind behind the original launch of the Mini Cooper in the US. In 2010, *Adweek* magazine named him Creative Director of the Decade, and he has been referred to as “advertising’s Elvis” and “perhaps the most influential figure in American advertising today.”

But a change in his life produced a radical shift in Bogusky’s thinking. Now he is bringing his considerable talent to bear on behalf of sustainability, health, and full transparency in business.

“If you grew up in advertising in my era, you grew up around the idea of ‘story,’” Bogusky told *Organic Connections*. “All brands are a ‘story.’ And the story was pretty much always fictional. You still see that out there. The one that I think of right away is ‘Coke Equals Happiness.’ That’s an extraordinarily fictional story. I think that within the next few years it will be as funny as ‘More doctors recommend Camel cigarettes than any other brand.’ When people originally heard that, it didn’t trigger mockery or laughter; but culture changes, and things that seemed reasonable at one time don’t seem reasonable anymore.”

“The best brands give you a real-time *accurate* picture of what the company is all about. What are they *really doing* right now? It means full transparency, because we’re going to have

the tools, such as social media, to figure that out anyway. So I’d say we’re seeing the sun setting on this idea of brands being fictional stories, and in my view, none too soon.”

The Change

It was two years ago that Bogusky took a different turn, thanks in part to his new place of residence. “A few things converged,” Bogusky explained. “One of them was that I had moved to Boulder about five years earlier. Boulder really has an effect on you, and that environment exposed me to a lot about food and our world that I hadn’t been exposed to



before. I was ready to just make a change, to try some things that were more in line with my values; because I’ve always felt when your values and your work are aligned, that’s when you are really effective. And I had had that most of my career, but not at the end.”

And where had those values run into conflict? “Probably mostly around food,” Bogusky replied. “I had been watching the obesity epidemic evolve. In my way of thinking, for a time, it was all about portion control, with maybe some of it attributable to exercise. I actually wrote a diet book four years ago called *The 9-Inch ‘Diet,’* all about portion control, ‘portion distortion’—kind of an ad

guy’s view of why we’re not able to manage our portions. The basic message was that no one is to blame; we’re very susceptible to getting confused because of our human design.

“But I started to realize that it wasn’t just the *amount*, it was also *what* we were eating. The very simple basic ingredients from when I was a young man weren’t the same; the number of food additives and the amount of genetically modified food that we were consuming had changed radically over probably the last 15 years. That correlation made me very suspicious. That’s where I began to feel like, boy—I grew up on fast food, ate a lot of fast food, but I don’t think the fast food that I ate is actually the equivalent of what you might pick up at a restaurant or the grocery store today.”

Insurgents’ Clubhouse

In 2010 Bogusky and his wife, Ana, opened a new firm in Boulder. They called it FearLess Cottage—an *informal clubhouse for insurgents in a new consumer revolution*. Immediately Bogusky became engaged in issues more aligned to his newfound values. “Pretty much the first guy who called me was Al Gore,” Bogusky said. “We worked on some advertising to debunk the myth of clean coal, which was pretty successful. I’ve been working a bunch on climate, but everything around sustainability is fascinating to me.”

“More recently I helped some old friends from CP+B start an agency called Made Movement, which is about the resurgence of manufacturing here in the US. I think a lot of what concerns us about the way things are made—whether it’s exploitation of workers, lead paint, safety concerns or dumping things in rivers—could be solved by bringing manufacturing back to the US. We do a leaner, cleaner kind of manufacturing here. So, as somebody who does care about sustainability, I view ‘Made in America’ in a



different manner than others: I find it's a way into sustainable manufacturing and less exploitation of workers that everybody agrees with."

Changing Corporate Behavior

In the overall changing landscape of the corporation-consumer relationship, Bogusky sees the consumer's role quite differently than

"Having been on the corporate side for most of my life, I notice that corporations are very good at working to keep government out of their business—to push off regulation, to lobby to get the things that they want. I believe they are more powerful than government now.

"But when *consumers* think anything, the corporations really react, because they have to. I don't know whether consumers realize it,

deceitful or misleading information, and to allow for unrestricted access to the complete information needed to make an informed choice. It also asserts the consumer's right to be heard, so that consumer interests receive full and sympathetic consideration in the formulation of government policy.

Part of the empowerment of consumers is education. Over a million people have now seen a video Bogusky produced for the Center for Science in the Public Interest called *The Real Bears*—a parody utilizing characters similar to those from a popular series of Coca-Cola ads to tell the actual story of soda and its extreme negative health effects. "At its most basic, we're trying to get people to understand soda's relationship to American health," Bogusky pointed out. "It's not inherently sexy or entertaining, so the goal was to create something that was entertaining enough yet still slipped in a whole bunch of facts and figures about what's really going on; also something that people felt was good enough for them to want to share it, because people don't generally share the bad stuff that much—there has to be some hope. Shortly after it launched, we saw over a million views, so people obviously have shared it. We're not done—I think we'll keep the characters alive and keep pushing it out there."

In another effort to educate consumers, Bogusky created a series of popular video ads in support of California's Proposition 37—the Mandatory Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food Initiative. One of these ads had an all-star cast including Danny DeVito, Emily Deschanel, Glenn Howerton, Kaitlin Olson, KaDee Strickland and Kristin Bauer van Straten.

Cardboard Wisdom

It is evident that Bogusky has a unique way of looking at the world. As an example, he's found innovative creativity in the cardboard signs being held by people at intersections and freeway ramp exits and entrances.

"When you're living on the street, the effectiveness of your communication matters," said Bogusky. "Here in Boulder I began to notice signs that were creative and sometimes funny. Was this something new? Was it effective? I decided that as a fan of creativity I would buy the signs that moved me—it would be how I decided to give or not.

"This is an ongoing dialogue through windshields across the country between those that have slipped through the cracks and those who are still hanging on. I can't help



I've felt for the last few years
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but with that corporate desire to get the dollar, they have enormous power. We have to move toward viewing ourselves in line with the way the world works now. We have to think of ourselves as 'consumer-slash-citizens.' A lot of people don't even like to consider themselves 'consumers'; but I always say, 'If you're not a consumer, prove it and stop breathing.' We all consume—that's a reality. We think of ourselves as voting at the polls, but we also vote with every dollar. We should leverage this moment to use social media to make sure that we amplify everything we feel about what we want to buy, the company we want to buy from, and what our expectations are for them. We have potentially a very transformational time right now. I do worry a little bit that the window is not open forever; whether it's SOPA [Stop Online Piracy Act] or other things, there are forces at play to corporatize the web. If that happens, we've likely missed our opportunity."

Conscious Consumer Rights

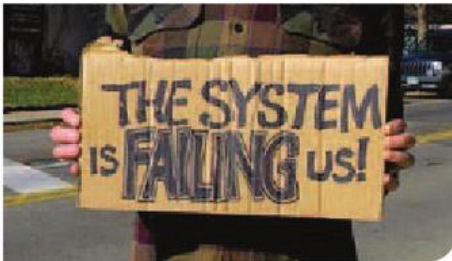
Bogusky has created a "Conscious Consumer Bill of Rights," which takes the consumer's elevated role into account. The bill includes the right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services that are hazardous to health, life or the safety of our future. It calls for the right to be protected against fraudulent,

in the past. "I've felt for the last few years that there truly is this window of opportunity," he said. "Because of the Internet and what happens online with transparency, there's an opportunity for consumers to really change corporate behavior.

but wonder, why does *that* sign say what it does? Why do the same themes and sometimes *the exact same words* crop up on signs a thousand miles apart?”

“But if they asked for my help, I would say—and it’s really not very complicated, and whether you are Patagonia or Wal-Mart I think it works equally well—you

match that, and it’s hard to see progress. I was thinking about theories of change and past great changes that I can recall, and what I’ve realized is that no one predicted that the Cold



look at your business and you ask, ‘What would we most *not* want to see a lot of news stories about, regarding the way we do things?’ You identify what that is, then you make a plan to at least partially address it. It doesn’t have to get you to the finish line—it just has to be the beginnings of ‘This is how we think we could begin to fix this.’ Then you take

War would end with people just smashing the Berlin Wall with sledgehammers. And no one predicted that technology and ideals would converge to create the Arab Spring.

“So I don’t think we really know what change is going to look like, regardless of how much we theorize about those outcomes. The reality of how we change is way too complicated; it’s almost like chemistry. The thing that I know is that part of all positive change is the opening up of dialogue. Where I believe I can work best is in that space: making sure that people learn about things that they wouldn’t learn about, and/or making sure that people are not intimidated by anybody

Bogusky now carries with him cardboard and markers so that the signs he purchases can be replaced. In talking with the people who made them, he has also discovered a lot about the types of individuals out there—and that much of what he’d heard and read didn’t hold true. “I learned that there are no two situations alike, and the idea that everybody living on the streets is there because they have mental or substance problems is a myth,” he said. “I also learned for myself that the myths that encourage us to be less generous have a cost greater than we realize.”

The Road Ahead

Bogusky has not entirely turned his back on the big corporations he used to have as clients, but he prefers the flexibility of smaller ventures. “I tend to like to work with smaller companies simply because if you’re a big company, you’re big because you think with the existing model. You don’t want change, as change doesn’t usually mean good things if you’re really big. Things are pretty good exactly the way they are; and if the big companies could just leave them the way they are, they’d be happiest.



the problem and the solution to your consumers. I think the ‘Footprint Chronicles’ that Patagonia did is one of the first and best examples of that. But there are a lot of others.” (The Footprint Chronicles is a campaign being conducted by Patagonia, showing the exact locations, routes and environmental impacts associated with the manufacture of their clothing line.)

For Bogusky the change in his life is permanent, and he has found his way. “I don’t know if it happens to everybody, but when I work on some of these issues I can get very depressed,” he said. “I start to develop these theories of what change might look like and model those out in my head; and then what’s happening day to day doesn’t seem to

else to not talk about things they want to talk about. It’s actually proven that if we have open dialogue, we’re a continually improving society and culture. When people try to stop that, they can stop it for a time but they can’t stop it forever. So how I want to work is *not* think about what happens, only think about, ‘Hey, is this a space where there is more for people to know? Is this a space where people are being intimidated and made afraid to say what they really think?’ Those are the places that I’d like to help out, and let other people figure out what actually happens.” ■

To dig deeper, check out www.fearlessrevolution.com.

Todmorden

Incredible Edible Town



Herb gardens in strips of earth bordering side-walks. Apples, pears, cherries, raspberries and strawberries growing all around the town's health center. Corn growing tall in front of the police station, and fruit trees surrounding the fire station. Vegetables (with invitations to "help yourself") next to the railway station and bordering parking lots. Residents growing food for themselves in any space not otherwise used. Visitors to the town invited to "take the walk" through the town center to view all of these edible delights for themselves.

No, this isn't a vision from an inspirational sustainable treatise—it's a real place. On the

I SAID, "WHAT WOULD YOU THINK IF WE SPENT THE REST OF OUR LIVES TRYING TO MAKE THIS TOWN AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ORDINARY FOLKS CAN LIVE THEIR LIVES DIFFERENTLY? IT'S COMPLETELY MAD, I EXPECT, BUT MAYBE WE'LL LEARN ENOUGH LESSONS TO TRY AND PERSUADE OTHER PEOPLE TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY THEMSELVES."

maps it is known as Todmorden, a market town of approximately 16,000 people located in West Yorkshire, England, situated between the northern cities of Manchester and Leeds. But to many who live there, it has

become happily known as Incredible Edible Todmorden—a real-life example of how far local agriculture can be taken.

Edible Todmorden was the brainchild of local resident Pam Warhurst, who simply decided one day that it was time to take action.

"I'm just a single mom who works in the public sector," Pam told *Organic Connections*. "I also had my own café and have done a lot

now and again you get one of these moments where you think, 'Better do something about this.' So rather than wait for anybody else to kick off with anything—because there didn't seem to be a lot of urgency around helping our kids to a better future—I made up Incredible Edible.

"I thought, 'Why don't I see if we can get the whole of the town of Todmorden—however long it takes—to change its behavior, to think about how we could live differently, get jobs differently, react as a community differently?' Then I thought, 'How the heck would we do that?' I got the idea we should use the language of food. We all eat; we all buy it or cook it or grow it or like it or dislike it—but we all eat. That is what it was all about. And it's an experiment, and it's volunteers, and it seems to work."

Pam's Story

Before transforming her town, public and environmental issues had been part of Pam's life for some time. "I'm an economist by training," she said. "I've never done that because it always struck me as absolutely ridiculous to believe that you could make a scientific exercise out of human behavior, which is all economics is, as far as I can see.

"What I did do is I got into some local politics. Twenty years ago I was leader of my local council, so I know how the public sector works. I know the public sector is filled with really good people who are seriously constrained on what they can do. So I don't bad-mouth them.

"In 1992 what really struck me was the Rio Summit. I recall them saying, 'You know, we've got some huge problems ahead for our children, around climate change.' They said—and I remember this very clearly—we must change the way we act. We must use fewer resources; we must do things differently."

"I got involved in rural stuff; people asked me to help on greening up urban areas and





connecting urban people with the countryside for health reasons. At the present I chair the National Forest Commission of Great Britain as my day job, and I do this [Edible Todmorden] the rest of the time—which is a lot of the time.”

The Three Plates

When Pam returned from her pivotal trip to London, her first step was to create a plan of action. “I got off the train in Todmorden and went straight round to someone who’s a real good friend of mine. I said, ‘What would you think if we spent the rest of our lives trying to make this town an example of how ordinary folks can live their lives differently? It’s completely mad, I expect, but maybe we’ll learn enough lessons to try and persuade other people to do things differently themselves.’ She said she was up for it.”

“We decided we could divide the way any town works into the idea of three spinning food plates—like in the good old days of the circus.

“If we thought about community—the way we older folks live our lives and what we do in our homes, in our back gardens and our front gardens, and along the side streets and where we shop—that would be one plate, one area of action.

“Then we looked at the skills we’d need to live in a different future. What’s being taught now in schools? Can we do something about that? What do we know that we’ve forgotten—like how to preserve fruit and how to graft trees, and all the sorts of things that would be really handy if you had a bit of a problem with the environment in the future and you wanted to do more stuff yourself? That was the second plate.

“And the third plate is a business plate. If we can create more local jobs, if we can actually get people supporting local farmers and shopping in their local shops for local food, it will give people a chance to consider staying in their hometown. They could become a veg grower or something, whatever it might be, or even a soil scientist—let’s be ambitious. So if we actually think about community, learning and business together, that creates an activity that makes a town really work.”

The First Plate

Once the plan was formulated, it was time to get the word out. “We decided to start with things you could point at, because this is merely an experiment and we don’t write

papers and we don’t do strategy documents—we just act. Hence we thought that rather than spend a long time trying to explain to people what the heck we were doing, we would create propaganda gardens all over the town. It says to people, ‘This is what you could grow if you wanted to. And actually you could make the center of your town look jolly interesting if you grew more fruit trees and strawberries and vegetables and whatever else it might be.’

“So we had a public meeting. We put an advert in the local paper that said, ‘Do you want to make this a better town? Do you want to grow more of your own food? Why don’t you come along tonight?’ And 60 people turned up! I simply talked to them like I’m talking to you. The whole room exploded—they loved it; they absolutely loved it.”

Action began straight away. “It started by creating town center sites—some that we



asked people’s permission for and others where we asked nobody’s permission. We started with grass verges* that looked horrible and were basically dog toilets, and we made them into herb gardens and they looked lovely; so, who’s going to complain about that?

“We went to the local health center where they had recently built a new £6 million building, but they’d surrounded it with prickly plums, which basically you can’t eat. All the doctors are keen on eating healthy food, so we asked them if they would mind if we planted food around the health center. They said no, providing it didn’t cost them any money. So we did some fundraising, kicked in our own money as well, and we planted it up. We got apple, pear, cherry, raspberry, strawberry and herbs. Kids and families walk to the doctor’s now through an edible landscape that they can help themselves to, if they want. Kids are starting to see how things are growing; so many have only seen stuff in plastic in a supermarket.

“We did the same at the police station—they’ve got a bit of ground there in the front, and we asked if they would mind if we did some planting. We planted maize [corn] in front of the police station, which was hilarious. The police really loved it because citizens of the town started to talk to them.

Food is a leveler. And what’s really interesting is that the police now say that in four years, vandalism in the middle of town has dropped and they’ve put it down to these propaganda gardens, because people don’t vandalize food in the same way that they might vandalize pretty plants.”

The work continued. They placed “Help yourself” planters outside the railway station, and vegetables around parking lots. The fire department saw what happened at the police station and planted their own fruit trees.

Then it came time to show it off. “We created an edible green route around the town,” Pam related. “It shows the propaganda gardens. It tells the stories of bees and pollination, and it’s got a few really lovely wooden sculptures along the way. It also takes people past the small shops in our market; so they get to see the whole town, not only the supermarket.

“What has happened is—like it or hate it—people have started to talk about food and local food and have begun to see spaces in the town differently.”

The Second Plate

Pam’s second spinning plate was education—which also took off with a roar. “While all this propaganda gardening was going on, we were talking, we were putting pieces in the paper, we were blogging and doing all this stuff that folks do. We put up a great website, which is run by a fabulous lady who is 68 years old. This changes people’s lives: this lady never got out before and now she takes tours around the town.

“At the high school, we’re building a big unit at the back on derelict land where we’ll be growing fish, vegetables and fruits, with aquaponics and hydroponics. We’ve set that in a landscape of maple trees, hazel trees and bees. The kids are on the social enterprise that runs it and they’re helping us build it. The head teacher now says that local food is the culture of that school, and whatever the lesson being taught, it needs to reference good food being grown and the potential of food bringing communities together.”

The Third Plate

The third plate was one of really ramping up local food sourcing. Pam explained: “If you spend your days walking through edible landscapes, and if you begin to understand the power of local food to bring the community together, then you start to think,

‘Well, I’d like to support my local market,’ or, ‘I’d like to find out what my local farm is selling.’ And that is what has happened. For example, we started a campaign called Every Egg Matters, because first, more than anything, it made us laugh; but we started

weren’t there before. So that’s kind of how we do it in Incredible Edible. We start small; I believe in the power of small actions. I think it’s really important that every single person has got a little piece of the jigsaw that can make the future a better place. And the

ordinary people, convinced that we’re going to do something to make a difference,” Pam concluded. “You can see the difference in our town—from the spaces that people are growing in, from going into shops that sell seeds and finding they’re sold out. We’ve got



it because we wanted to showcase local residents who did egg production. We thought that the people of Todmorden would really support local production; and we didn’t have any big bucks to do big campaigns, so we were just going to do something that kind of grew organically.

“We created this stylized map of Todmorden with six of the main roads in it. We put on that map locations of people who kept chickens—but small numbers between 12 and 20, where they were selling at their garden gate, where they were selling to neighbors. We began with 4 producers and now we’ve got 64. It has gotten people to be more aware of the Todmorden egg, if you like, and so they’re going into shops asking for the Todmorden egg.

“It’s all about little shoots of economic confidence. We now have small local businesses making cheese, bread or beer that

power of just using food is that it’s not complicated. You don’t have to have a degree.”

The World Taking Notice

Now the world is taking notice of this outstanding example of local agriculture. “All the time we’ve got people from everywhere on the globe giving us a ring, coming to visit us, walking around the town,” Pam said. “I was invited over to Barcelona in Spain. I met some young people at the university there, and some professional designers and architects who were brilliant. They have decided to do this project, Incredible Edible, in the middle of Barcelona—a city of 4.5 million people. They said, ‘We love it. We’ve fooled around with blindfolds on for too long. Let’s make our own city better and let’s get people growing their own food.’

“It’s a really good story of really good people,

the council now asking, ‘How can we do this in other places?’ We’ve got the health center saying, ‘We want to brand your green route as a healthy walk.’

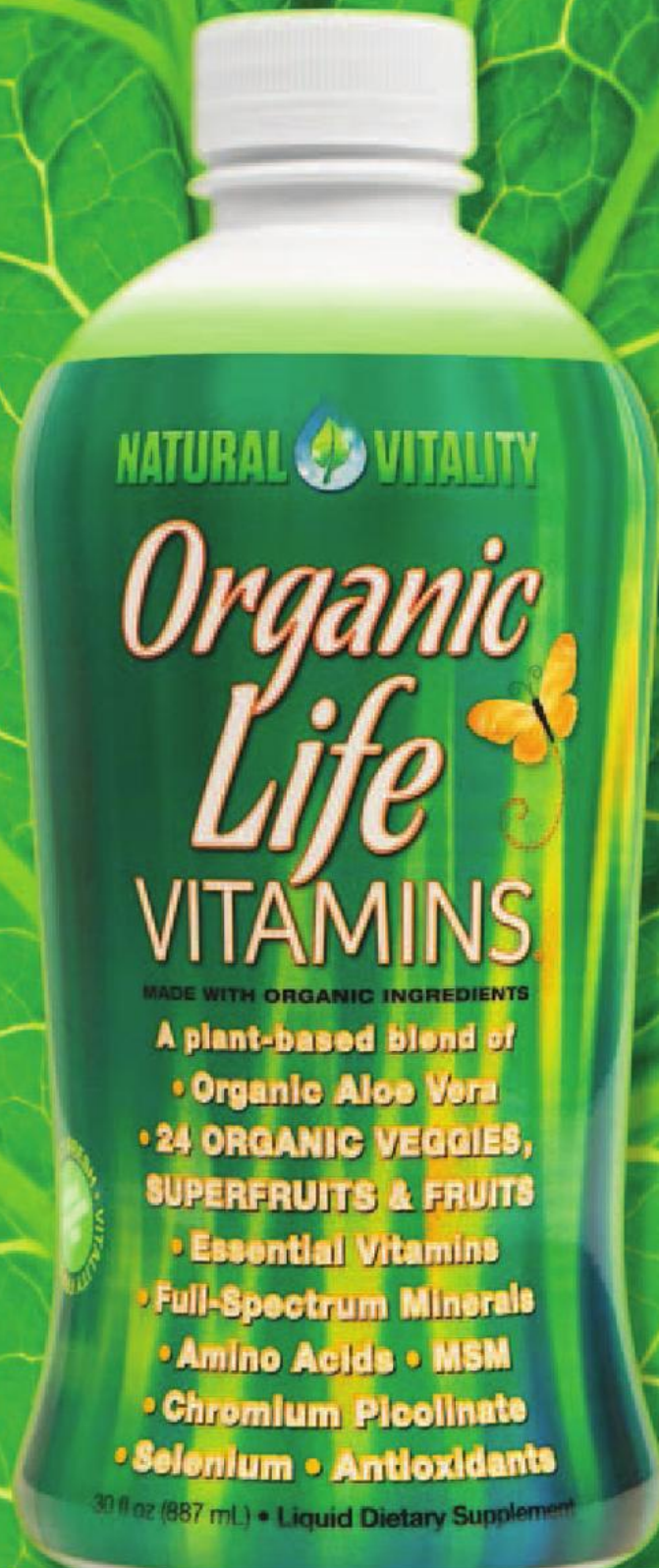
“Over all the years, the conclusion I have come to is this: If you want to bring about real change, you have to engage ordinary folk. Don’t do things to them. Don’t insult them by not telling them why you’re doing things. Help them to understand through simple mechanisms, because they’re not stupid, and because they will look after their children and they will look after their town.” ■

*You can find out more by visiting
www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk.*

*verge: (British definition) a narrow strip of turf bordering on a sidewalk, path or road.

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