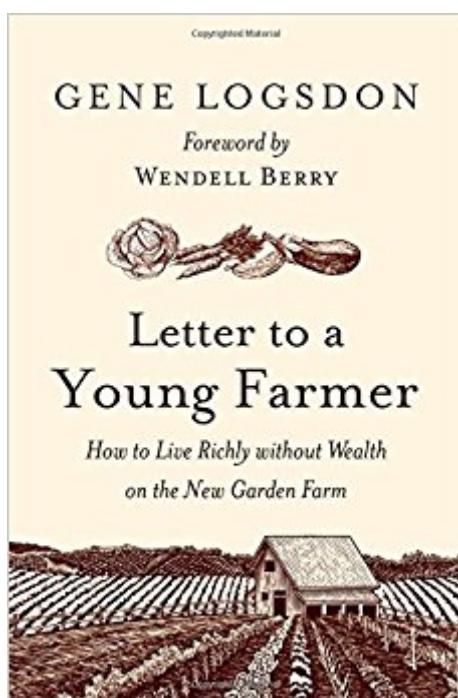


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Letter To A Young Farmer: How To Live Richly Without Wealth On The New Garden Farm



Synopsis

For more than four decades, the self-described “contrary farmer” and writer Gene Logsdon has commented on the state of American agriculture. In *Letter to a Young Farmer*, his final book of essays, Logsdon addresses the next generation of young people who are moving back to the land to enjoy a better way of life as small-scale “garden farmers.” It’s a lifestyle that isn’t defined by accumulating wealth or by the “get big or get out” agribusiness mindset. Instead, it’s one that recognizes the beauty of nature, cherishes the land, respects our fellow creatures, and values rural traditions. It’s one that also looks forward and embraces “right technologies,” including new and innovative ways of working smarter, not harder, and avoiding premature burnout. Completed only a few weeks before the author’s death, *Letter to a Young Farmer* is a remarkable testament to the life and wisdom of one of the greatest rural philosophers and writers of our time. Gene’s earthy wit and sometimes irreverent humor combines with his valuable perspectives on many wide-ranging subjects—everything from how to show a ram who’s boss to enjoying the almost churchlike calmness of a well-built livestock barn. Reading this book is like sitting down on the porch with a neighbor who has learned the ways of farming through years of long observation and practice. Someone, in short, who has “seen it all” and has much to say, and much to teach us, if we only take the time to listen and learn. And Gene Logsdon was the best kind of teacher: equal parts storyteller, idealist, and rabble-rouser. His vision of a nation filled with garden farmers, based in cities, towns, and countrysides, will resonate with many people, both young and old, who long to create a more sustainable, meaningful life for themselves and a better world for all of us.

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Customer Reviews

Kirkus Reviews- ["An elegant, modern georgic in prose by Gene Logsdon \(Gene Everlasting, 2013, etc.\). Of a piece with the works of Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and other modern back-to-the-landers, Logsdon's last book \(he died in May 2016\) comprises a set of essays addressed to an imagined young person contemplating a life in the fields. There's no such thing as the American farmer,"](#) [counsels the author at the outset. Instead, there are beet farmers, dairy farmers, flower farmers, marijuana farmers, and even moonshine farmers,](#) [which makes it difficult to categorize all the different kinds of farmers and to subsume them into any meaningful political organization. The point is that because there is so much diversity in farming, anyone with intelligence, gumption, and stick-to-itiveness shouldn't be dissuaded from having a go at it. Of course, there are plenty of reasons not to farm, and Logsdon isn't shy of enumerating the challenges, from the fiscal and physical ones to matters that embrace even the heart: one of his essays concerns how to find a suitable helpmeet out in the sticks, where, as a former seminarian, he discovered there were girls peeking out from behind every crossroads stop sign in the county.](#) [Times change, but the struggle continues, one aspect of it the corporatization of farming. Oddly, there Logsdon finds an ally in the chain restaurateur Bob Evans, who encouraged those who would listen to invest in biological over mechanical solutions, saying, "tractors don't have babies."](#) [Logsdon is encouraging without being Pollyannaish, homespun while also sometimes arch: "On the occasions when I have had to travel in city traffic, the thought always occurs to me that people who must commute into cities to work spend about as much time just waiting for traffic lights to change as it takes me to write a book."](#) [From raising cattle to organizing markets, there's much value here for every aspiring farmer, whose work requires brains along with brawn.](#) [Foreword Reviews- "This engaging, conversational book dispenses life advice for farmers and others who seek to live close to the earth. Letter to a Young Farmer is an accumulation of wisdom with a large dollop of humor and a conversational tone that will endear it to almost every audience. The book recalls a conversation with a parent or older family member in that many of its common-sense directives are informed by experience, from the purchasing of land to the management of aggressive rams. But](#)

not all the advice here is specific to farmers or 'garden farmers'; general life advice can be extrapolated from discussions of love, finance, and other common-sense aspects of life. Categorizing Letter is tricky at times, perhaps appropriately so, stating that 'contrary farmers,' as the author self-identifies, tend to defy stereotyping. It is philosophical, but it also dispenses concrete advice. Likewise, though it does present useful information, much of this is apocryphal, cast in a slyly humorous way, and even opinionated. For example, the author agrees that climate change is a problem, but he also describes people concerned over the issue as paranoid 'hand-wringers.' Letter is best read as an inspirational piece. It seems likely to lure many a gardening neophyte to the farm life, though it takes care to stress the difficulty of this path too. Above all, it preaches consistency, locality, and the long view, occasionally contrasting this philosophy with the frantic pace of mainstream modern life. In the book's worldview, small farming is the key to solving the most serious of our environmental, mental, and physical problems as well as the existential emptiness of consumerism. Yet at the same time, it does not advocate complete abandonment of capitalist modality. Parts of the book recall Buddhist principles of moderation. With its unique point of view, Letter to a Young Farmer is a must-read piece of environmental, agricultural, and social philosophy.

•Booklist- If Logsdon (1932-2016) had his way, the term 'contrary farmer' would have been every bit as familiar as country farmer. A learned proponent of 'Eco-stay in and stay small' garden farming, Logsdon's outspoken outlook was completely in opposition to the practices and philosophies of corporate agribusiness. Instead of encouraging farmers to 'go big or get out' by adding more property, more machinery, and more debt, Logsdon championed the idea of working on a more personal scale that allows farmers to appreciate nature and honor tradition while still accepting technology and innovation. In this posthumously published book of essays, Logsdon extols the virtues of finding a good mate, praises the pluck and professionalism of women farmers, and enthuses about the health benefits of a day in the barn. Along with other hard-earned advice about hauling livestock, pasturing chickens, and controlling weeds, Logsdon's lifetime of farming wisdom is firmly lodged in common sense. Sagacious and sly, practical and poetic, Logsdon's voice may have been contrarian but it was never condescending.

“In the midst of our epidemic fear of the future and its so-far predicted emergencies and catastrophes, here is Gene patiently, quietly, with the right touch of merriment, talking about the small, really possible ways of solving our one great problem: how to live on the Earth without destroying it.”

Wendell Berry, from the foreword

Publishers Weekly- Late Ohioan farmer Logsdon (Gene Everlasting: A Contrary Farmer's Thoughts

on Living Forever) sends a meaningful (though poorly titled) message to up-and-coming homestead farmers. Written during the late stages of an illness that would take the author's life in 2016, the book stands as his final assertion and rallying cry against the misguided notion, so prevalent at one time, that farmers needed to 'get big or get out.' The book isn't written in the intimate style of a personal missive as the title suggests; it's more of an essay collection squarely addressing topics such as small-scale economics, pasture farming, raising sheep, and the 'modern plowgirl,' with practical-minded advice throughout. This work serves as a guiding light and lodestar for farmers facing the modern challenges of any farming operation, large or small.

Over the course of his long life and career as a writer, farmer, and journalist, Gene Logsdon published more than two dozen books, both practical and philosophical, on all aspects of rural life and affairs. His nonfiction works include *Gene Everlasting*, *A Sanctuary of Trees*, and *Living at Nature's Pace*. He wrote a popular blog, *The Contrary Farmer*, as well as an award-winning column for the *Carey, Ohio Progressor Times*. Gene was also a contributor to *Farming Magazine* and *The Draft Horse Journal*. He lived and farmed in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, where he died in 2016, a few weeks after finishing his final book, *Letter to a Young Farmer*.

I bought this for a young, organic farmer, but had to read it first since Logsdon was a contributing columnist to the local paper I take. For someone who wants to live simply, this is a wonderful guide.

I never been disappointed with anything gene logsdon ever wrote.

Fast service! Great gift!

Gene Logsdon always has wise words to say. I have thoroughly enjoyed all his books. So sad that he passed.

Full of wisdom and insights. Gene's last book is a winner.

Incredible author - his last book, and definitely worth reading if you have any desire to live off the land (even just an acre or 2). This prolific writer lived the life that many would love to emulate. Get

away from the grind, live simply, live richly. I have read much of Logsdon's writing, and looked forward to this one being written as he knew he was dying from cancer. I highly recommend it.

Mr. Logsdon's last book is outstanding. The garden farm is growing exponentially and Gene's writing captures the essence of this movement. All of his books make you think and dream.

I'm a bit torn over how to review this book. It was after reading *The Contrary Farmer* that my wife and I decided to take the plunge and start our own small (or "garden") farm, and I am forever indebted to Gene Logsdon. His has always been a voice of reason, and along with Wendell Berry (and others) has helped to keep us on what we consider the right path. After reading of Gene's death last year, and learning of the publishing of this last work of his, I was excited to get a copy and start reading. But the content does not, in my opinion, live up to the promise of the title. It reads less as a letter and more as a collection of essays on various topics--right up Gene's alley. Maybe reading between the lines one can think of it as more direct and personal, but I found the title misleading, and the content ultimately disappointing. Throughout the book I found examples of language that seemed somewhat forced and unpolished. My assumption is that the editorial process was never completely finished--which would make sense given the context in which the book was written. But there were multiple places where I thought to myself, Gene is/was a better writer than this. In the end, this book comes across more as a victory lap for Gene's career. My suggestion for anyone who wants what the title and subtitle offer would be to start with a copy of *The Contrary Farmer*, which is much more the 'guide' that I expected this book to be. (Then read Wendell Berry's Sabbath poem titled "The Farm," and read it over and over and over again.) But all that said, *Letter To A Young Farmer* is still worth reading. It's full of Gene's characteristic wit and his great hope for humanity. If I could, I would probably give this 3.5 stars, but in this case I'll gladly err on the side of generosity.

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