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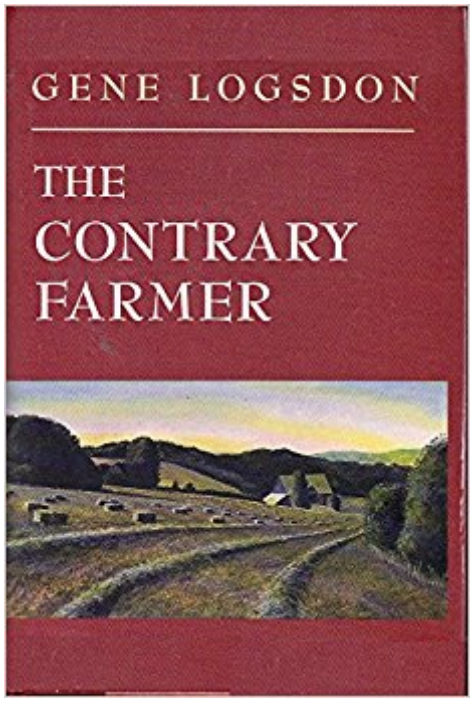
The Contrary Farmer (The Real Goods Independent Living Books)



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Synopsis

Gene Logsdon has become something of a rabble-rouser in progressive farm circles, stirring up debates and controversies with his popular New Farm Magazine column, The Contrary Farmer. One of Logsdon’s principle contrarieties is the opinion that--popular images of the vanishing American farmer, notwithstanding--greater numbers of people in the U.S. will soon be growing and raising a greater share of their own food than at any time since the last century. Instead of vanishing, more and more farmers will be cottage farming, part-time. This detailed and personal account of how Logsdon’s family uses the art and science of agriculture to achieve a reasonably happy and ecologically sane way of life in an example for all who seek a sustainable lifestyle. In The Contrary Farmer, Logsdon offers the tried-and-true, practical advice of a manual for the cottage farmer, as well as the subtler delights of a meditation in praise of work and pleasure. The Contrary Farmer will give its readers tools and tenets, but also hilarious commentaries and beautiful evocations of the Ohio countryside that Logsdon knows as his place in the universe. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a highly enjoyable book about how to make a profit on a small farm. The author’s contention is that few people will ever get rich any more farming, but a family that’s willing to work hard should be able to earn the money they need on a farm with considerably less than 100 acres. Logsdon stresses that if you calculate a dollar value for your labor, you’ll find that your hourly wage is rather

low, but on the other hand, if you enjoy what you're doing, then perhaps it isn't really valid to calculate the hourly wage anyhow. There's no arguing that farm labor is hard work, but how many city people pay large sums of money for gym memberships in order to get the exercise that they miss while sitting at their desks? Hoeing a garden provides great exercise at no cost, as well as an income when the produce is sold. However, on a huge factory farm, weeds must be controlled with herbicides or expensive gas-driven machinery, which brings down the profitability of the enterprise as well as damaging the environment. Logsdon's golden rule is never to finance farming by borrowing. He points out that "rates of money growth (interest) seldom match rates of biological growth," so borrowing money to buy farm or equipment or land is almost always the start of a losing proposition.After the first few chapters about what he terms "pastoral economics", Logsdon devotes separate chapters to each of the parts of his small farm ecosystem, the garden, the animals, water, meadows, trees, corn, mechanics, and pastures. Although he eschews wide-spread use of pesticides, he's not an organic purist, which may rub certified organic farmers the wrong way. He's very keen on maintaining animals like some sheep and chickens, a few pigs, and a cow or two.

I am interested in starting up a small farm, and Logsdon's book offers a lot of old-friend advice on how to keep a farm without going broke or biting off more than you can chew. He draws from almost thirty years of experience to tell the reader the best way to raise livestock, maintain pasture and cultivated land, dig a pond, fell trees, and well, you get the idea. It makes me want to put into practice what I read as soon as possible. I look at the land in a whole different way thanks to this book. For those of you into the Bible, this book offers great instructions on being a steward of the land. If you take care of your trees and animals, they'll take care of you.This book does leave me with a lot of questions, which is good and frustrating at the same time. Since Gene Logsdon grew up on a farm and has spent all his life writing for farmers, he might take for granted the knowledge he has that some of us new to agriculture might not. I still don't know what a combine is, or what a manure spreader looks like, or what keeps the layers warm in the henhouse over the winter. Logsdon mentions in the chapter about forestry that illustrations would best explain the safety precautions that he details with words. That makes me think that maybe there are no illustrations in the book because of restrictions set by the printer or editor.I would also like to know what assets to look for when buying a farm, or how to go about buying one in the first place. Logsdon also lets on little about what his wife contributes to their 32-acre homestead. He refers to his work only in the first person singular, though obviously it takes at least two people to do the work.

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