

# ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

New Towns Take People  
Back To Nature

"We need people! We are a non-profit association working to establish a cooperative community. We've just acquired over 900 acres of beautiful rolling countryside. We especially need skilled people — carpenters, farmers, teachers. Come and help us create! We need your talent and energy."

Classified advertisements like that are cropping up frequently nowadays as more and more idealistic people try to establish new back-to-the-land communities. Some of the projects are well-thought-out and financed. Others prove to be impractical, pie-in-the-sky dreams. But the planners generally share certain common goals.

Most are disillusioned with urban and suburban living as we know it. They want to get away from the bad effects of our technological society: pollution, greed, crime and the nine-to-five rat race. They're betting that by starting with a clean slate, they won't repeat the same mistakes.

Residents of the new communities are seeking self-sufficiency in food, energy and even education. They've seen enough of energy crunches and food shortages to distrust our highly-centralized economy. They want to raise their own livestock, grow their own food, and generate their own power from the wind or methane gas.

Honest labor, even if it means hard physical toil, is welcomed. Farming, gardening and handcraft cottage industry usually form the economic core of new communities.



What I really think the young people especially are trying to do is recreate a peasant style of life in a modern, enlightened way. They have seen the damage to body and soul that machine living has done to their parents' generation. They find real freedom to exercise their minds while tilling the soil, or while reveling in the good feeling that manual work can give.

"You know, some kids today wish the Depression would happen all over again!" a student told me. "We want to test ourselves, to see if we can measure up. We read about the way people lived in the Depression, and it doesn't sound all bad to us."

These "new peasants" are also vitally concerned about the environment. They want to live close to nature without destroying it. Many new communities put strict limits on their population density right at the outset.

One of the most ambitious and carefully-planned new town projects is the Pahana Town Forum, 629 State St., Santa Barbara, Calif. Since 1971 it has attracted about 2,500 members who have indicated a desire to build a town from scratch. The Forum has acquired a 1,400 acre site in a beautiful forested valley in western Oregon, and construction is expected to begin soon.

Pahana is anything but a refuge for dissatisfied youths seeking to "drop out." Engineers, salesmen, teachers, housewives, and retired people have all expressed an interest in the new town. And they've been sending in their suggestions for how the community should be structured right from the beginning.

They've planned a village where automobile traffic will be virtually eliminated. Industries are to be small and non-polluting. An natural open space and wildlife will be carefully preserved.

Garden Way, Inc., in Charlotte, Vt., is planning a series of unique new communities built around gardening. Residents,

from all walks of life, would still commute to jobs in the outside world. But they would share and work large garden plots right at their doorsteps.

Don't get the idea, though, that you must move to the country to participate in a new community. Communitas is a Washington, D.C., organization that is building a more natural, self-sufficient community in a square-mile urban neighborhood.

So far, the multiracial and mixed income group has established several collectively-owned retail food outlets and a trucking cooperative.

Urban gardening and agriculture will play a big part in the future of Communitas. One member has already raised one thousand pounds of rainbow trout in his basement, at an estimated cost of about 65 cents a pound. The system could be adopted by other residents. "We have calculated, using local retail figures, that we could easily supply the entire community's fish needs," says a Communitas publication.

Also on the drawing board is a neighborhood treatment plant for fertilizer production and methane gas generation. "A family of four can almost generate enough methane from its own wastes to cook its foods, and if we add garbage and trash of the average family, it is more than enough," according to Communitas.

One thing is for sure. No matter how the new towns fare in coming years, any setbacks won't be for lack of enthusiasm. "It's going to take a lot of hard work and we can depend upon being met with difficulties and disappointments," says Chris Canfield of the Pahana Town Forum. "But the opportunity is here and now!"

Want to be more self-sufficient? "How to Live on Less and Love It More" is a 50-page guide to putting your house and ground to work for you — naturally. To get a copy, send fifty cents to Robert Rodale, Organic Living, in care of this newspaper. Please ask for the booklet by name and allow at least three weeks for delivery.

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