

WORMFARM INSTITUTE



In 2020 **Local Voices Network** collaborated with **Wormfarm Institute** and **Rural Urban FLOW** for a series of 24 conversations that engaged 136 voices across two campaigns: *Food, Farming and the Land*, and *Rural-Urban Continuum*. Two of the *Rural-Urban Continuum* conversations started with kickstarter events led by poet Dasha Kelly and conservation biologist Curt Meine.

Scripts were developed for each conversation series, focused on personal experience, observation and stories. This Report is organized according to themes that emerged from the conversations, and follows the arc of the script. Community challenges are described in the first two sections, and ideas for solutions are covered in the last two. An Appendix details conversation highlights referenced throughout the Report.

Our 2020 collaboration lays a foundation for continuing dialogue among diverse groups of participants with connections to Wisconsin. Due to the pandemic, we were unable to host conversations in-person, so participants were limited to those with stable internet access, and Zoom learning curve and burnout presented some challenges in building participation. We realize that the voices in these conversations by no means represent a complete picture of the communities where we live and work. In the next phase of our collaboration, we aim to reach more farmers, conservatives, young adults, and Spanish-speaking communities. We are laying plans to host additional conversations in 2021 and look forward to sharing more information.



All images are from the 2020 Farm/Art DTour, a 50-mile self-guided agri/cultural excursion through Sauk County Wisconsin's working farmland, presented by Wormfarm Institute.

Photography by Katrin Talbot.

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Divisions

Bridging divides was at the heart of our conversations in 2020, as their negative effects were felt in many aspects of life. Participants discussed sharp divides between people, places, ideologies, farming methods, and political beliefs. Often the sense of division arose from fear of the unknown, and was held responsible for creating [stereotypes](#) and halting progress towards cooperation and necessary change in our communities.

Sharp divisions and borders are not common in [landscapes](#), and the fact that they have been imposed on people and places was described as [the result of a colonial mindset](#) and a [disconnect from ecology](#).

Rural-Urban Divide

The [rural-urban divide](#), and [all that it embodies politically and socially](#), was an overarching

topic. This divide was described

as being [as old as civilization itself](#) and related to the human behavior of [clustering and going to what we know](#). It often stands in for other polarizing issues and is deepened by fear, suspicion, and a [lack of gratitude](#). There was a sense that the rural-urban divide has been [used by politicians](#) to create mistrust between people, which is then harnessed for political gain.



Sauk County cow pasture.

(Agri)cultural Divisions

Within rural places, [differences in ideology and farming practices](#) between [conventional farmers and small-scale farmers](#) are perceived as stark and [divisive](#). Nostalgia can influence [perceptions of farming operations](#) as well, even leading to the assumption that animal health is valued less in large modern farms. But in reality, [farming is not mapped so neatly onto labels](#) like “organic” and “industrial” and is much more tied to personal philosophy. “Good farming” is not limited to any one practice or approach.

Racism in Rural Spaces

People described [feelings of not belonging](#) and [dehumanization](#) in spaces along the rural-urban continuum, and of needing to work to overcome assumptions made about them. The [racist histories](#) of our shared spaces are still felt, and often continue in practice. Our current system of farming and land ownership can be traced back to [genocide and slavery](#) and this history still affects who has access to land today.

People expressed a wish for more diversity in rural areas, and yet rural communities are not always perceived as welcoming to outsiders. People described getting the sense that they needed to have [been in a community for generations to be considered local](#), and that [diversity may not be seen as an enhancement](#). In particular the [burdens placed on people of color moving to rural areas can be significant](#). In urban and rural areas alike, [we rely on people of color and immigrants](#) for our food production and preparation, and yet [migrant workers experience blatant prejudice and dangerous working conditions](#).

Imbalances in Agriculture and Rural Communities

Climate Change

Farmers, regardless of their farming practices, are [on the frontlines of the climate crisis](#), which is compounding inherent difficulties in food production. Climate change is [already rapidly changing the way we farm](#). Unpredictable and [extreme weather patterns](#), especially [rain events](#), have intensified over the last five years.



Agriculture is [foundational to our existence](#), so [opportunities for transformations in farming practices](#) have far-reaching positive effects.

Ecological Imbalance

Many participants expressed worry about the resilience of our food system. Often [we do not examine the resources needed for large-scale agriculture](#), and assume that we need to work at this scale to be efficient. We are so removed from the source of our food, and [industrial farming](#) requires [exploitation of land](#) and [people](#) at almost every step of the way.

Within modern agriculture, there is an [element of controlling the land](#) that is often [at odds with the natural world](#). There are so [few patches of natural habitat left](#) in many of our landscapes, and farms are [scaling up with almost no barriers](#). For individual farmers, rising economic pressure can require [using every inch of land](#) to increase profit. When land is not thought of or treated as [a living system](#), it has pronounced consequences [for native wildlife](#). There are stark [visual reminders in our landscapes](#) of [how industrial agriculture can be ecologically harmful](#) and [inhumane to livestock](#).

Economics and Food Access

Throughout the conversations, food was seen as a fundamental human right and there was concern about [applying capitalistic principles to food access](#). In particular, people worried about the alarming disparities in access to fresh food. We are caught in a cycle of [overproduction and overconsumption](#), which is reflected in [households spending less money on food](#) and more money on healthcare.



Veggie Emporium farmstand.

Individual farms continue getting larger, often to the detriment of local ecologies and communities, and people felt that change was impossible due to [current policies subsidizing large agribusinesses](#). However, it takes a [huge amount of labor to run a small farm](#), and many [worry that small-scale farming is not efficient enough to replace industrial agriculture](#).

Rural Communities

Changes in farming practices, the consolidation of farms, and the difficult economic situation are all reflected in rural community life. The compounding economic and environmental [wicked problems](#) are forcing farmers out and, in particular, [dairy farmers are stretched thin](#). Day-to-day operations on some farms [don't leave enough time for things like childcare](#), or require [multiple generations to sacrifice their time](#) in order to make a profit. It is [difficult to mentor someone to take over a farm](#) because of the low economic incentive and endless work required.

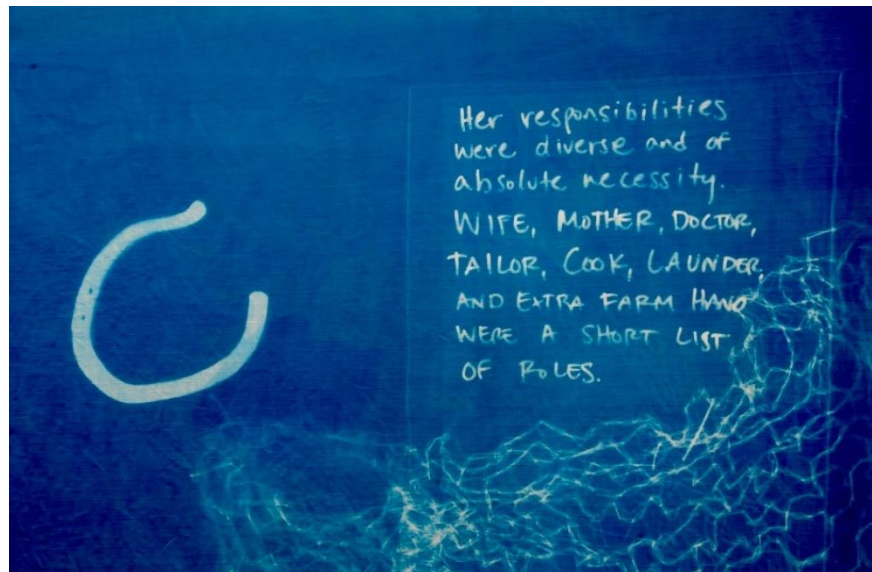
Over the past few decades, the dairy crisis has changed our rural landscape, leaving [abandoned farm buildings](#) as a legacy around the countryside. In what has been called the [hollowing out of America](#),

rural areas are becoming depopulated as [young people leave](#) and farms consolidate into larger, more industrial operations. This creates a deep cultural loss and leaves us [vulnerable to economic collapse](#).

People brought up the disconnect between the [current agricultural policy and the policy we need](#) in order to help extremely hard-working farmers. There was a strong sense of solidarity and concern for farmers and an understanding that these are [systemic problems](#).

(Re)building Community

Despite the deep-rooted challenges inherent to these conversations, people focused on hope for regrowing meaningful connections between community members and [expanding our idea of community](#). There was an understanding that vulnerability and discomfort are necessary to [move this conversation forward](#).



Detail of 'Fluvial' by Sheila Novak, Emilie Bouvier and Crysten Nesseth.

Many people emphasized [recognizing the humanity](#) in others and [showing care](#) to [create connections](#) where it sometimes seems impossible. [Calling attention](#) to commonalities or just [recognizing](#) and [affirming](#) the [small things you notice](#) about people in your community can be powerful. It is important to have an [open mind in new spaces while also representing yourself truthfully](#) and [being seen and heard](#) in the places where you are.



Valley of Our Lady Monastery welcoming visitors.

People who grew up in farming communities in the early 1900s remember being raised in a culture of [personal responsibility for the well-being of the whole community](#). In recent decades, many of us are existing in 'bubbles' of like-minded people, and seem to be [losing the ability to connect and have empathy](#). There are efforts now to [help neighbors in simple, immediate ways](#) that are nonpartisan. This mindset can be thought of as [creating villages](#) within rural or urban areas where tight-knit communities can thrive.

An important aspect of rebuilding or strengthening communities involves taking the time to [slow down and reevaluate](#). The well-established divides in our society were described as a result of laziness or rushing in the way that we relate to each other, and [rebuilding across these divides](#) requires a different approach. By limiting whom we communicate and empathize with, we are losing the ability to hear and respect diverging points of view. [Authentic connections](#) take time and mutual intention to build.

At its onset, [the pandemic seemed like the pause we collectively needed](#) to reorient ourselves and our values. However, this pause was arguably limited and restricted to those who could afford it. Overall, it appears that we are not taking the time to think deeply about our ways of living, and this has to do with maintaining the status quo and the [fear held by some that slowness may lead to radical change](#).

Despite there being so many divisions in our world today, the [creative community has the skill and potential to build bridges](#). This can be catalyzed by [inviting people into your world to see your perspective](#), and thinking critically but with hope: [speaking things into existence](#).

Food as Culture

Many people spoke about the value of [knowing their family history through food traditions](#) and associating food with a [season or community](#).

Buying food from local farms helped people get to [know a place](#), and [hunting](#), fishing, and [foraging for wild foods](#) fostered connections to the land and within families. Many foods have a [deep cultural and personal significance](#) and sometimes these [converge across cultures](#).



Roadside Culture Stand at a Food Chain location.

In recent years, attention has been focused on [growing your own food or sourcing it from neighbors](#). In the Midwest, traditional methods of growing and preserving food have been [part of our culture for generations](#). Some people spoke of [growing up as McDonald's kids](#) or [in an era of canned food](#), but reconnecting to past generations by learning to grow, preserve or cook food from scratch was co-present in their experience.



'Get to the Pie' by Brent Houzenga.

Moving Towards Resilience in Agriculture

Agriculture is now part of the broader environmental conversation, and so [many different people are paying attention](#) to what is going on in our rural lands. There is a slowly growing [awareness of the externalized costs](#) of industrial agriculture. Once we understand

the complexities of the larger systems we are part of, it is easier to [see the big impacts of small changes](#).

Despite the disillusionment with current farming policy and environmental impacts, there was a clear [respect conveyed for farmers](#) and the understanding that they are not the root of the problem. By necessity, farmers have a [strong commitment](#) and [love for their work](#) and the [lands they farm](#). [Their knowledge](#), derived from needing to understand the land, is crucial to untangling the environmental problems we face. Many people hope that in the coming years, [farmers](#) and agricultural professions will gain wider respect across the rural-urban continuum.

Many participants were encouraged by the increased enthusiasm for [gardening during the pandemic](#) and by more [food being grown in urban settings](#). Stories focused on neighbors [growing and sharing food](#), people in the [farming community](#) [adapting and helping each other](#), and the [emotional and spiritual benefits](#) of growing food and connecting to the land.



A Field Note reflecting on Land.

There was interest in finding a way to serve [sustainable food in public institutions](#) and integrating [food systems and learning](#) in schools and universities, with the goal that nearly everyone should [think of themselves, in some way, as connected to farming](#). [We all eat food](#) and so no one exists outside of this conversation.

Although [individual decisions](#) about nutrition and sustainability are important in creating resilient food systems, the focus should also be kept [on policy](#). Policymakers have a responsibility to keep communities healthy, and so [policy should be aimed at sustainability and equity](#). We have the opportunity to think more broadly and creatively about agriculture and incorporate things like [renewable energy](#) into our production systems and landscapes.

We can draw from our [cultural histories](#) to reestablish [diverse food systems](#) and [rural communities](#). [Diversity](#) among farms should be celebrated and enhanced, particularly in our [vibrant underground organic farming communities](#). Additionally, we can encourage [more](#)

[people to move to rural areas](#), revitalizing rural communities and connections to food. [Working on tangible projects on the land](#), in any setting on the rural-urban continuum, helps us set aside identity for a while and [connect with others over land stewardship](#).

Rural-Urban Continuum + Connectivity

Many people expressed gratitude for having a chance to [participate in conversations](#) about the rural/urban divide and the state of modern agriculture. There was a desire to talk openly about the ways that we experience division in society and about concerns regarding the future.

Despite the conversations being centered on heavy topics, people focused on their deep



Poetry reading by Madison Poet Laureate Angela Trudell Vasquez.

appreciation for things like [shared meals](#), art projects, the [transfer of knowledge](#), and [cultural exchanges](#) across landscapes.

The landscapes surrounding us were not historically divided. We created those divides, in very real ways, but many conversations ended with the hope that we also have the ability to bridge them.

Rural and urban spaces are not static, and neither are we as individuals. No matter where we are on the rural-urban continuum, we are not standing still, even from a [historic](#) or [genetic](#) perspective. The [resilience of our communities](#) depends on connectivity between rural and urban places, and the flow of physical resources like building materials and food.

An abundance of [commonalities](#) exist between rural and urban spaces: [food, watersheds, stories, history, climate, art](#). Negative experiences as well, like [loss of industry or small farms](#), can serve as a reminder that we have shared difficulties and basic needs.

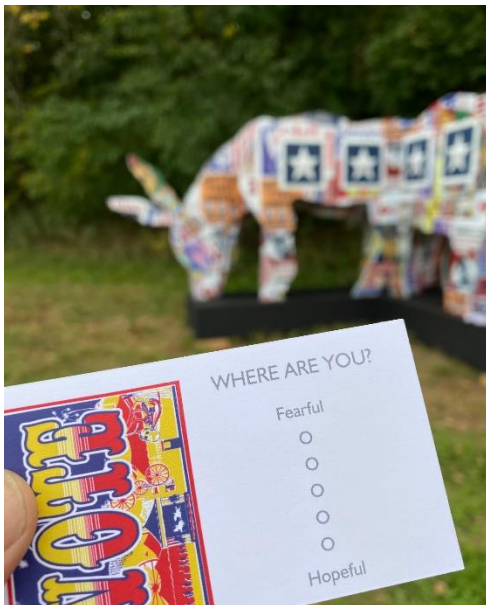
Strengthening the rural-urban continuum does not overshadow the value of individual rootedness or experiences in place. The cultural exchange between places is only meaningful if we take the time to [explore and develop a strong connection to our own place](#) along the continuum. However, we should realize that our lives and stories don't exist in isolation: they are embedded within each other in [expanding circles and webs](#).



Rural Urban FLOW mobile stage visiting Sauk County.

Leadership and Civic Engagement

Throughout the conversations there was a sense of exhaustion with [current political strategy](#) and the social repercussions surrounding the election. Participants expressed a desire for [fair and honest elections](#), and to [feel like their voices are heard](#) by our representatives, yet progress towards these goals can seem unattainable. They also discussed wanting leaders who are [courageous and work across the political divide](#), and the importance of [not confusing power and authority with actual leadership](#).



Detail of 'Step Right Up! Your Votes, Your Voices!' by Erika Nelson.

Many conversations arrived at an understanding that we are [in need of a major creative change](#) in the way that we live and relate to each other. The health of [our democracy](#) and our survival in the face of climate change are at stake.

While traveling through urban and rural landscapes, we can relate to people in different settings by [stepping through into their reality](#), bringing [attention to what connects us](#) instead of divides us. The rural-urban divide

is political, and so [intentionally working across it](#) by [talking with people on both sides](#) is an act of civic engagement.

An invitation, drawing from many conversations:

- We can commit to [action beyond conversations like these while continuing the practice of listening](#) and being open-minded.
- In our work, we can have the mindset of [leaving things better for the generations coming after us](#). We can support young people and [cooperate between generations](#).
- We can [raise our voices to the media and government](#) about needing more sustainability in agriculture.
- We can look [critically at policy](#) and its history of racism and marginalization, and think about how we can move policy forward through deep listening and collaboration.
- We can help people understand what is possible regarding [home and land ownership](#) and revitalizing rural (and urban) areas.
- We can approach this work with an [attitude of celebration](#).



'Volunteers' by Brian Sobaski.

Appendix: Description of Conversation Highlights

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Divisions summary:

[Donna](#) talks about thinking regionally rather than being oriented around borders

[Dasha](#) talks about moving past quick archetypes

[Melanie](#) talks about the colonial mindset of divisions and borders

[Laura](#) shares concerns of how disconnected people have become from their food

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Rural-Urban Divide summary:

[Curt](#) summarizes the history of the rural-urban divide

[Tiffany](#) talks about how divided Mississippi is, despite the whole state being more or less rural

[Jay](#) wonders if the divide is intractable, but brings up food as a point of connection

[Sara](#) talks about cluster behavior and how this can lead to divisions

[Tamsi](#) frames the question of division in terms of gratitude

[Jay](#) talks about Kathy Cramer's book *The Politics of Resentment* and how division has been cultivated for political benefit in Wisconsin

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the (Agri)cultural Divisions summary:

[Donna](#) talks about starting a CSA farm surrounded by conventionally farming neighbors

[James](#) raises concerns about the adversarial relationship between small farmers and industrial agriculture

[Andrea](#) stresses the need for more support and open discussion between different kinds of farmers

[Dorothy](#), a farmer in Sauk County, WI describes the tension between sustainability and animal care

[Laura](#) points out that the distinction between organic and non-organic or big and small farms doesn't always map neatly onto good farming and bad farming

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Racism in Rural Spaces summary:

[Kanala](#) talks about growing up in Wisconsin and calling it home without being able to feel comfortable in many places in the state, especially rural and northern parts

[Adam](#) talks about Sundown Towns and the residual fear in rural spaces, acknowledging the truth of the past fully before moving towards reconciliation

[Sherry](#) talks about the Great Migration, the connection to rural life, and dehumanization by white people

[Bobbi](#) talks about how white settlers first acquired farmland through violence and exploitation and how that history still affects who has access to farmland today

[Joy](#) talks about belonging or being considered an outsider in a small town

[Eleanor](#) remembers a conversation at the height of the campaign wishing more black and brown people would move to rural areas

[Mary](#) talks about immigration in rural communities, and the differences between generations

[Adam](#) shares his experience talking to food truck owners in Milwaukee and stresses the importance of recognizing how we rely on Black people and immigrants for our food

[Dave](#) talks about his connection with refugees working in meat packing plants and brings up how race plays a major role in our treatment of essential workers

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Climate Change summary:

[Jen](#) describes the values that tend to get tied to farmers, their necessary and impressive work ethic, and the fact that they experience climate change firsthand

[Lisa](#) uses the viability of growing sweet potatoes in Wisconsin as an example of just how fast the climate is changing and how noticeable it is from a farmer's perspective

[Laura](#) talks about how climate change is already directly affecting local farmers through increasingly heavy rainfall and unpredictable weather patterns

[Rob](#), a farmer in La Valle, WI shares how climate change has caused ruinous rain

[Philip](#) talks about food and water being foundational to life

[Rick](#) talks about the problems and opportunities involved in changing agriculture

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Ecological Imbalance summary:

[Jim](#) calls into question the idea that conventional, industrial farms are the most efficient way to grow food, pointing out that most of the world's food is produced by women of color and even large farms rely on a lot of hand labor

[Rita](#) compares the rural landscape of WI to the northeast and wonders how we can get back to producing food that is consumed locally

[Philip](#) expresses concern about the exploitative nature of farming in a global system

[Dave](#) brings up the human labor involved in fruit and vegetable farming and the massive amounts of exploitation and inequity involved in producing our food

[Jay](#) summarizes the disconnect between agricultural knowledge and ecological knowledge

[Jay](#) talks about the element of control in farming that is often at odds with conservation

[Tori](#) talks about farming drastically reducing patches of native habitat in our landscapes

[Larry](#) expresses concern about the growing size of farms and how it can put strain on our natural resources, using the Colorado river as an example

[Jeanine](#) in Dane County has noticed economic pressure leading to unsustainable farming

[Rob](#), a farmer from La Valle, WI shares concerns about the cost of land for rural farmers

[Dave](#) talks about how industrial agriculture and the pressure to extract maximum yields from the land has led to devastating effects on wildlife and biodiversity

[Rita](#) describes seeing the bare soil from roundup run off at a farm visit as stark visual example of the ugly realities of using harsh chemicals in agriculture

[Jim](#) raises concerns about the changing insect populations and their relationship to climate change and industrial agriculture, as well as the potential effects of proposed genetic engineering on mosquitoes

[Rick](#) uses a harrowing story of hundreds of pigs dying after a lightning strike took out the fans in their building as an example of the ethical problems with factory farms

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Economics and Food Access summary:

[Philip](#) says applying monetary value to food has changed the way we think about it

[Ben](#) talks about the cycle of overproduction, overconsumption, and waste

[Lisa](#) talks about how food as a share of the average household budget has shrunk

[Angie](#) stresses the role of policy in shaping agricultural trends

[Laura](#) talks about the huge amount of labor required to maintain a small farm and wonders if small farms like hers are financially viable in the long term

[Dan](#) expresses concerns over whether organic farming is efficient enough to feed the world or whether conventional farming is necessary

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Rural Communities summary:

[Jen](#) talks about the interconnected nature of problems in our society today, rooted in values

[Dorothy](#), a dairy farmer from Sauk County, shares how the dairy economy has been challenging for farmers in recent years and has gotten worse with the pandemic

[Gene](#), a farmer from Fairfield, WI describes the loss of dairy farms in the community

[Mona](#), from Fairfield, WI describes how childcare and other duties get short shrift when farmers are dealing with crushing debt

[Eugene](#), a farmer from Fairfield, WI describes how the struggles of small family farms affect multiple generations

[Jim](#) explains how he's seen the increasing economic hardship placed on farmers lead to the depopulation and decline of rural communities

[Curt](#) describes the decline of rural communities and deindustrialization of urban communities

[Dan](#) expresses concern that the shift from small farms to a few industrial agriculture operations has left our society vulnerable in the event of economic collapse

[Larry](#) talks about how hard it is to make a profit as a small farmer and how that creates a barrier for new people to enter the farming business

[Andrea](#) talks about the challenges of being a low-level government employee and being intimately familiar with the challenges and concerns of local people but not having the power to change the way the system works

[Dorothy](#) explains that the system is broken

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the (Re)building Community summary:

[Donna](#) talks about the expanded idea of a backyard, treating each other better in this mindset

[Yolanda](#) talks about positivity and thinking about possibilities beyond what we see before us

[Mary](#) talks about being present with people in a socially distant world

[Yolanda](#) talks about leading with love and caring, how it makes it easier to build connections and bridge differences

[Joy](#) talks about common ground and seeing individuals as people rather than their values

[Martina](#) talks about the value of noticing and mentioning relatable things in another person

[Joy](#) talks about 'random acts of recognition'

[Martina](#) talks about 'affirm you're awesome' and elaborates on recognition

[Donna](#) shares a small moment of recognition by another person that meant a lot

[Tiffany](#) talks about having an open mind in new places and staying true to yourself

[Dasha](#) talks about the journey of being seen and heard in a place

[Jim](#) relates how living in a farming community helps build a sense of responsibility and community cohesion

[Philip](#) talks about the way we are becoming more insulated and losing our capacity for conversations across divides, and ways to begin breaking down compartmentalization

[Joy](#) talks about the Volunteer Corps in Spring Green

[Ben](#) talks about creating and seeking villages wherever he lives, the value of respect

[Philip](#) talks about encouraging people to take their time and slow down decision making

[Philip](#) talks about divisive elections and the time it will take to bridge the gap

[Joy](#) talks about building relationships and connections within families and communities

[Mary](#) talks about the pandemic pausing life

[Joys](#) talks about privilege in slowing down, how part of our society doesn't want us to do that

[Melanie](#) talks about the creative community building bridges

[Mary](#) talks about common ground

[Rayshawn](#) talks about positive energy and speaking things into existence

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Food as Culture summary:

[Angie](#) talks about knowing your culture and family history through food, family recipes

[Dave](#) talks about his love of cherry tomatoes and how closely tied that flavor is to the feeling of summer in Baraboo

[Ashley](#) expresses her appreciation for eating local foods and how it helps her build a personal connection to the place where she lives

[Laura](#) talks about learning to hunt squirrels and how it has become an important way for her to connect with friends and family

[Jeannine](#) shares how learning about foraging completely changed how she viewed the land around her

[James](#) shares how important challah is to him and how his sister remembered how to make challah even after suffering brain damage

[Sophia](#) talks about how arroz con leche is a meaningful food to her and how many cultures have similar foods by different names

[Jim](#) talks about how important eating local foods is to him

[Kirsten](#) talks about the importance of pickling in her family

[Laura](#) shares about a food that's important to her

[Donna](#) shares a food that's important to her

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Moving Towards Resilience in Agriculture summary:

[Donna](#) talks about the increased attention to agriculture in the conservation community

[Jay](#) describes the agricultural system as vulture capitalism

[Philip](#) talks about how the phrase 'small can make a big impact' can be visualized as a circle

[Dan](#) expresses respect for the discipline and commitment to routine that farmers maintain

[Laura](#) describes the dedication in the farm community

[Dave](#) shares his appreciation for farmers' dedication to farming and their commitment to caring for the land

[Eugene](#), a farmer from Fairfield, WI describes the intimate connection to the land he cultivates with his family

[Philip](#) talks more about moving past preconceptions we have about farmers, and what they have to contribute to healing our connection to land

[Donna](#) talks about hoping farming as a profession will start to be valued again

[James](#) expresses hope that the pandemic will help individuals and communities develop more self-reliance in their food supply

[Tyler](#) talks about the rural/urban divide and his hope for hybrid spaces in the future where food is grown in the city and spaces are integrated

[James](#) talks about how happy he is to see so many people in his neighborhood gardening

[Becky](#) talks about some of the ways the farming community has stepped up to help those in need during the pandemic

[Kirsten](#) expresses how community gardens can provide a source of emotional healing and connectedness, particularly in times of crisis

[Rita](#) calls for institutions that serve large congregate meals to use sustainably produced food

[Rita](#) proposes practical ways to incorporate food and agriculture into a wide variety of fields of study at universities

[Rick](#) expresses desire for more people to engage consciously with agriculture

[Dasha](#) talks about being part of the rural-urban continuum just by eating

[Laura](#) from Viroqua speaks to connection between food and healthcare

[Angie](#) talks about efforts to increase communication between small farms and community gardens and institutions that could distribute their food as well as policy makers

[Jim](#) calls for legislators to keep resiliency of our food systems in mind when designing policy and to distribute stimulus not only to large producers but small farms and working people

[Rick](#) offers some hope for how the rise of renewable energy can help small farms stay afloat

[Rita](#) describes the idea of using rye to start a regional grain shed

[Rick](#) advocates for more diversification in crops, livestock, and farming practices, and emphasizes the need for funding and subsidies to help people take those steps

[Kanala](#) envisions a future with more diverse rural communities and Black farmers living in rural spaces

[Dorothy](#) talks about the diversity of farms and how we can portray agriculture

[Dave](#) shares appreciation for farmers' dedication to farming and their commitment to caring for the land

[Laura](#) hopes folks move to the country

[Curt](#) talks about setting aside your identity to do a task on the land with other people, a different kind of meaning than talking

[Alejandra](#) talks about finding community through stories and values related to growing food and land stewardship

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Rural-Urban Continuum and Connectivity summary:

[Angie](#) talks about how nice it is sharing space with people and learning about people

[Elena](#) talks about being a chef and how it helps connect rural and urban spaces over meals

[Martina](#) talks about the transfer of agricultural knowledge from Wormfarm to Milwaukee

[Angie](#) reads a quote from C.D. Wright about the rural urban divide

[Kimo](#) talks about valuing a connection to roots

[George](#) talks about how even our genetics are on a journey and no one is ever standing still

[Alejandra](#) talks about the pandemic drawing attention to the fragility of our systems and the way we really live in one community and need each other

[Ben](#) talks about finding cultural connections that help us bridge rural and urban places

[Curt](#) describes the Rural Urban Flow and focus on connections rather than divisions

[Adam](#) talks about the commonality between rural and urban Wisconsin when a major industry leaves a place

[Adam](#) talks about the importance of having time to explore your own culture and seeing the value of your own space, which enhances the value of exchange between these spaces

[Wyeth](#) talks about nested communities, ways of belonging, how you can't divide things out

Specific conversation highlights mentioned in the Civic Engagement summary:

[Jen](#) from Sauk City wants to see more nuance in political dialogue

[Erin](#) in La Valle is concerned about election integrity and water access in the state

[Joann](#) in Reedsburg doesn't feel represented by local politicians: she's concerned about climate change

[Dorothy's](#) message to our politicians

[Curt](#) talks about leadership emerging and not being confused with power or authority

[Sara](#) describes the detrimental effect the disconnections in our society are to ourselves and surrounding ecology

[Curt](#) underscores the importance of overcoming the rural/urban divide

[Regina](#) describes relating to people in different parts of the state as stepping through into their reality

[Curt](#) talks about the importance of community leadership in cultivating common ground

[Curt](#) talks about the need for citizens to be intentional about reweaving the fabric, wherever they are in the rural-urban gradient

[Wyeth](#) talks about how people who move between rural and urban spaces have the role of introducing empathy and understanding to each side

[Martina](#) talks about the importance of rebuilding connections but in a meaningful way, avoiding the savior complex, really embodying what it mean to belong to water for example, being open and curious

[Elena](#) talks about being a chef and how it helps connect rural and urban spaces over meals

[Adam](#) expresses his hope for how intergenerational cooperation can help us move forward

[Jen](#) talks about the impact of food production on the land and wishing the media and public would hear the message that we need sustainability

[Alejandra](#) talks about the role of policy in this conversation

[Kanala](#) talks about the importance of dreaming, helping people understand what is possible, with regards to ownership and land ownership: how owning property gives a sense of authority, more fully occupying/connecting to a place

[Sheila](#) says it's important to approach conversations around food, farming, culture, and social change with an attitude of celebration