



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Wes Jackson / The Land Institute (USA)

(2000)



"...for his single-minded commitment to developing an agriculture that is both highly productive and truly ecologically sustainable."

Wes Jackson

The Land Institute (TLI) is a private, non-profit organisation established in rural Kansas in 1976. Wes Jackson, geneticist-agronomist, was its co-founder, abandoning academic life to pursue his vision of a natural farming system based on perennial crops.

At the outset, Jackson set himself and the Institute a 50-year timeframe for proving and demonstrating that there is a better alternative to the wasteful and destructive conventional agriculture. The alternative in his region would be a mix of perennial foodgrains, derived from perennializing conventional annual crops plus domesticating wild perennials. The biggest advantages would be ecological stability and grain yields hopefully as good as those achieved with annual crops. The ecological objectives would be attained by ending the huge problem of soil erosion, since annual ploughing would no longer be needed, and by ending the pollution caused by agrichemicals.

Through the 1980s the Institute's long-term research, education and field trials took shape. By the mid-1990s, at the end of the programme's second decade, Jackson was able to report positive answers to his key research questions, some of which were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Jackson has emphasised that the implications of this work were not limited to the American prairies. "By demonstrating underlying principles rather than practical applications only, we are showing that the 'natural systems' approach could be transferable worldwide, as long as adequate research is devoted to developing species and mixtures of species appropriate to specific environments. We believe that an agriculture is well within reach that is resilient, economical, ecologically responsible and socially just."

Also in the 1990s, Wes Jackson received a Pew Conservation Scholar Award and a Macarthur Fellowship (1992), a book was published on the Land Institute's first 10 years - *Farming in Nature's Image: An ecological approach to Agriculture* - and *Life* magazine included Jackson among 18 individuals it predicted would make history as "important Americans of the 20th century". By the end

of the decade more researchers in different universities and institutes were taking up the challenge of perennial crops - often inspired by his example.

For the future, Jackson aims to establish a full-scale Center for Natural Systems Agriculture. An advisory team has been assembled who believe the work is worthy of major funding. In 1998, Newsweek described the Land Institute as "the spiritual home for a growing group of farmers, scientists and prairie visionaries who are quietly redefining the meaning of agriculture." And the article concluded: "The first domestication of grains paved the way for 10,000 years of civilisation. If Jackson can persuade the world to re-examine the way we farm, he might just buy us another millennium or two."

Quotation

"The agriculture we seek will act like an ecosystem, feature material recycling and run on the contemporary sunlight of our star."

Wes Jackson

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