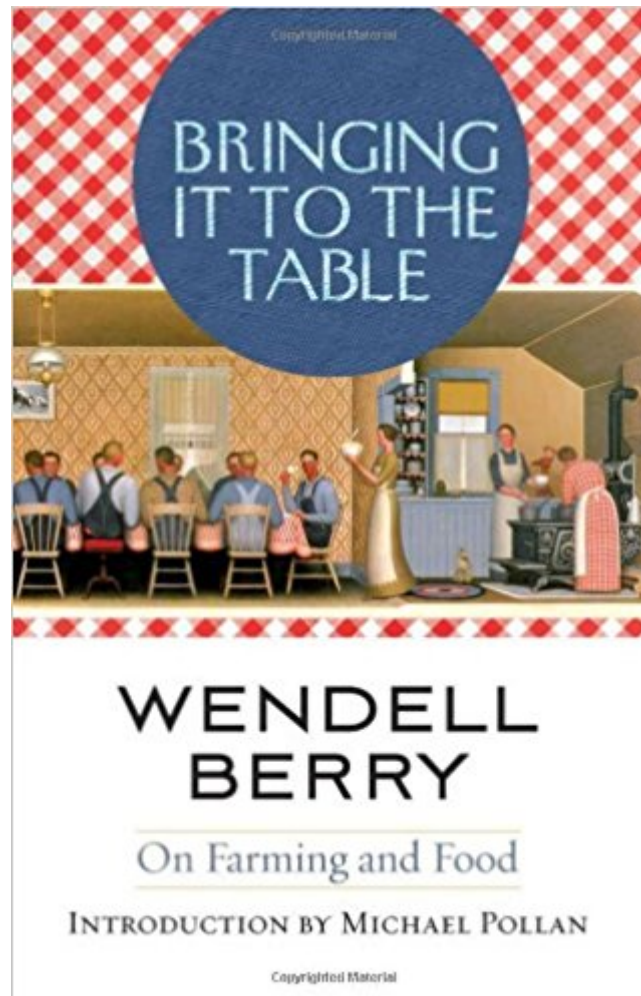




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# Bringing It To The Table: On Farming And Food



## Synopsis

Only a farmer could delve so deeply into the origins of food, and only a writer of Wendell Berry's caliber could convey it with such conviction and eloquence. Long before Whole Foods organic produce was available at your local supermarket, Berry was farming with the purity of food in mind. For the last five decades, Berry has embodied mindful eating through his land practices and his writing. In recognition of that influence, Michael Pollan here offers an introduction to this wonderful collection. Drawn from over thirty years of work, this collection joins bestsellers *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, by Pollan, and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, by Barbara Kingsolver, as essential reading for anyone who cares about what they eat. The essays address such concerns as: How does organic measure up against locally grown? What are the differences between small and large farms, and how does that affect what you put on your dinner table? What can you do to support sustainable agriculture? A progenitor of the Slow Food movement, Wendell Berry reminds us all to take the time to understand the basics of what we ingest. "Eating is an agriculture act," he writes. Indeed, we are all players in the food economy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Berry's themes are reflections of his life: friends, family, the farm, the nature around us as well as within. He speaks strongly for himself and sometimes for the lost heart of the country. As he has borne witness to the world for eight decades, what he offers us now in this new collection of poems is of incomparable value. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Bringing It to the Table is a treasure-house of Wendell Berry's work, an important collection of essays and excerpts gathered from his essays and fiction. A cantankerous, argumentative, eloquent writer who knows farming and food from field to table, Berry has been writing for more than forty years about the sadly declining state of American agriculture, the dangers of industrialized food farming, and the importance to the human community--and to the human body, mind, and soul--of good husbandry. If you've been reading Berry over the years (my husband and I chose an excerpt from *The Unsettling of America* for our wedding ceremony in 1986), you'll find some jewels here, all the richer for their association with other pieces in the collection. If you're new to Berry's work, you'll be astonished at his prescience: as Michael Pollan writes in his introduction, Berry is among the very first to point out the dangers of our American industrial agriculture and our disastrous separation of food production from food preparation and consumption. *Bringing It to the Table* is divided into three sections. In "Farming," the essays (1971-2004) provide a compelling review of the central argument of all Berry's work: that we must "adopt nature as measure" and create farming practices that deeply connected to the "nature of the particular place." Industrial agriculture arming ignores and attempts to overcome the natural limits of place, seasons, soils, and resources. It is, Berry warns, "a failure on its way to being a catastrophe." This place-focus continues in the second section, "Farmers." It includes seven elegiac essays that describe true farmers, not dependent on fossil fuels or large farm debt, in touch with their soils, their climates, their animals--people who understand and work within the limits of responsible husbandry. These farmers range from the traditional Amish to the Land Institute, where a radical new science adopts the natural ecosystem as "the first standard of agricultural performance." The third section, "Food," brings farm husbandry and farm housewifery together, with excerpts from Berry's fiction: people sitting down to eat the food they have planted, raised, harvested, cooked, and served. It is beautifully illustrated by the cover image: Grant Wood's *Dinner for Threshers*. The painting frames Berry's argument that "eating is an agricultural act," that we must eat what is grown locally and prepared in our own kitchens, not prepackaged, precooked, premasticated. It also demonstrates what, in Berry's view, is the central stabilizing force and foundation of the agricultural partnership: that women and men work together to unite household and farm, and that "traditional farm housewifery"--helping with the work of the farm, preserving the harvest, and preparing the family's food--is the essential contribution of women to the farm household economy. Within this context, it is an honored contribution, not to be "belittled" as "women's work." As we face climate change, resource depletion, financial insecurity, and health issues created by poor food choices, the sustainable production and consumption of our food will undoubtedly be one of the most challenging issues of the twenty-first century. Wendell Berry has

been trying to tell us this for many decades. It's high time we began to listen.

I'm not finished reading it yet, but what I have read sounds like a bellwether of impending doom for our current agriculture system. What Berry is stating makes much sense. I would encourage anyone to read this book if they're interested in knowing where the food on our supermarket shelves really comes from.

Excellent book, by a superlative author. A must read - as are all of his books!

A strong collection of essays on food production. It is less strong on food consumption - even though the material in the Food section (as opposed to Farming and Farmers) isn't as strong, it is deeply touching. The Food section comes from Berry's fiction. My only worry is that Berry may have, perhaps, romanticized Amish farming, leaving farmers and ranchers who've made multi-million dollar commitments to the kind of farming Berry seems as destructive, with no alternative. It is difficult to say to any worker "What you are doing is going to kill you and all of us. Stop it all now!" and have that worker agree to return farming of fifty or one hundred years ago.

Dated but good history!

This book is an excellent introduction to Wendell Berry's thought on farming and food. My main interest in reading Berry stemmed from reading Michael Pollan, who quotes Berry repeatedly in *Omnivore's Dilemma*. I had known about Berry and his poetry for many years, of course, but this collection seemed to be a good way in, rather than through his novels or poetry. I was initially concerned that the essays might seem dated or be too repetitive of the same points, and so I was delighted to discover that each essay, written between 1971 and 2006, seemed as fresh and relevant to me today as when they were written. Berry's essays on the Amish and a farmer by the name of Lencie Clippinger are absolute gems. All of the pages in this book are infused with a deep appreciation of the natural world and its astonishing interconnectedness. They approach the transcendent but never overreach.

Purchased as a gift, I've read most of the essays by Wendell. True wisdom exists in what is written. The introduction by Michael Pollan sets the appropriate tone. For someone who has spend a life in agriculture and natural resource care, Wendell was always out ahead with insights that empowered

those who followed. For those of living in and from Appalachian, this is our poet and philosopher.

Wendell Berry considers the whole story about America's current system of food production. Measuring agricultural success only in terms of the size of the crops fails to tell the whole story. Berry emphasizes the consequences of excessive dependence on fossil fuels and damage to the environment. He challenges the agricultural education establishment, based primarily in land grant universities, to teach what he considers more responsible methods of farming. Berry's expertise as a writer is demonstrated in his sometimes poignant vignettes of several exemplary farms that he visited.

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