

VALUE MEALS

Thank you for John Schwenkler's article about the inherent conservative values in the local-food movement taking root in these United States ("Food for Thought," June 30). I appreciated several things about it: First, he does not rely excessively on Wendell Berry—of whom I am a great admirer—as so many local-food proponents do. Second, he deals concisely and gently with Bill McKibben's tendency to promote an unproven, too rosy picture of "sustainable (insert appropriate life task here)." And finally, he implicitly challenges the strained argument I often hear conservatives make: that we must resist the local-food movement because industrial agriculture feeds the world. The truth is that it malnourishes the world, plays into the hands of too-powerful governments, and further increases our dependency on oil.

He should have gone further and explained that not only is his CSA share less expensive and of higher quality than the same items from his grocer, but that his \$24.50 reflects the real cost—plus a profit to the farmer—of getting that food to him and his family, something the industrialized, centralized food system simply does not account for, thanks to the externalization of such costs as water pollution and underpaid laborers.

JASON BURGETT

Burlington, Vt.

FEED THE GOVERNMENT

Interesting article for this urban Democrat and Slow Food member. I couldn't agree more that sustainable agriculture should be a conservative cause, but that kind of conservatism vanished a long time ago.

The problem for today's conservatives is that the market will always favor cheap solutions, and cheap solutions tend to be dirty and large. So for the local-food movement to grow and return our culture to erstwhile conservative values of family, land, and neighborhood, there needs to be an activist gov-

ernment squarely facing off against hog lagoons, feedlots, and other agribusiness abuses, so necessary to profits and so deadly to neighbors. And that part is not conservative-friendly.

PETER BASCH

Via e-mail

SMALL SHOPS PROFIT US

Concluding his fine commentary, John Schwenkler notes, "This [food localization] is a conservative cause if ever there was one." I'll add that the conservative argument for localizing our eating applies to localizing our other commercial choices as well.

Doing business with our neighbors builds trust and community cohesiveness and usually supports businesses with operating hours that allow employees to engage in a healthy family life. Each dollar spent at a chain store is a vote for anonymous commercial transactions in lieu of building relationships and weakens local self-reliance in favor of centralizing power in distant corporations with little accountability to the communities in which they operate.

Food localization is one piece of a broad rapidly accelerating movement that includes "buy local" campaigns and policy initiatives to halt corporate subsidies and close tax loopholes. In the past few years, nearly 50 communities of widely varied size and character have launched Independent Business Alliances that publicize the benefits of doing business locally and unite local entrepreneurs to compete successfully.

Publicly traded corporations are amoral institutions by design, mandated to pursue maximization of profit at the expense of all else. If we wish to change our hyper-commercial culture of consumption and related societal problems, supporting locally owned business is essential.

JEFF MILCHEN

Cofounder,

American Independent Business Alliance

Bozeman, Mont.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

In your symposium "How Good Was the Good War?" (July 14), Stuart Reid is right to suggest that the Vietnam War ought to be considered "another success of the military-industrial complex." The current Iraq War is another such success. Each time the American voters were deliberately frightened by false claims that their security was at stake, and each time a hugely profitable enterprise was put into motion and sustained for years.

A unified Vietnam posed no threat to the national interests of the United States. Anticommunist hysteria caused the American public to be deceived into believing that fighting the insurgents in the rice paddies of Southeast Asia was necessary to avoid having to fight in North America. A similar climate was generated by Norman Podhoretz and his followers, so that millions of Americans thought their own security was at risk because Saddam Hussein had some inaccurate Scud missiles that could be fired at Tel Aviv.

JAMES CANNING

Seattle, Wash.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Thank you so much for your excellent collection of articles examining the necessity of America's involvement in World War II. Unfortunately, this is one of many sanctified notions that our intelligentsia rarely questions.

Violence is always a failure of human imagination, and war is the ugliest and stupidest thing that human beings do. I realize that life often forces us to choose between varieties of failure, so I cannot accept absolute pacifism. But any leader who would send our young men and women off to kill and die better have an extremely compelling justification, and anyone who cheers at the beginning of a war is the damndest sort of fool.

"Glory, glory, hallelujah" is a bizarre response to carnage.

RICHARD W. BRAY

San Dimas, Calif.



[COVER]

The Anthrax Files

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM The official investigation into the 2001 bioterror attacks has been closed, but the case remains shrouded in mystery. **Page 6**

[MEMORIAM]

The Last Dissident

BY JEREMY BEER Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was more than just a survivor of the gulag, he was a perceptive critic of the West's own flaws. **Page 10**

[WAR]

Innocents Lost

BY KELLEY BEAUCAR VLAHOS Refugees of the war we waged turn to prostitution to survive. **Page 12**

[WORLD]

Czechoslovakia on Their Minds

BY LEON HADAR Pay no attention to the facts about Georgia, say the neocons. Just think about Hitler. **Page 15**

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[WAR]

WE ARE NOT GEORGIANS

It should be said in George W. Bush's defense that he prefers to kid around with the women on the U.S. beach volleyball team and lead cheers for Michael Phelps than make belligerent statements about events in Russia's backyard. Not so his would-be successor, John McCain. In the days following Russia's incursion into Georgia, the Arizona senator made it clear that he's loaded for bear and just itching for a military confrontation in which to demonstrate again what a tough and angry man he is.

"We are all Georgians," McCain said while campaigning in Pennsylvania. No, Senator, we're not.

This outburst seems to have been building for a long time in McCain, who transparently yearns to restart a Cold War with Russia, in addition to bomb, bomb, bombing Iran. Is there any country he doesn't want to antagonize? He thinks it clever to insult Prime Minister Vladimir Putin by referring to his former KGB ties and has chosen as a top foreign-policy adviser Randy Scheunemann—who not long ago was a paid agent of Georgia pushing the brilliant idea of getting the little country admitted into NATO. (If he had succeeded, we might now be at war with Moscow.)

Obama, too, has condemned the Russian campaign, but you get the sense that there is some perspective in his denunciation—some recognition that Georgia has been acting provocatively and that the West pushed too hard in the matter of Kosovo independence, where it had no serious interests and Russia did. He shows some understanding that Georgia's tinpot democracy—much less its control of Ossetia—is not a factor Americans want determining the temperature of their relations with Russia.

There are bigger issues at stake. If even Bush can realize that, perhaps McCain will come to his senses.



[SCANDAL]

ENQUIRING MINDS

Ann Coulter was wrong about John Edwards. The suspiciously well-manicured presidential wannabe has the normal sex drive of an unscrupulous Southern politician—like Bill Clinton or David Vitter, not Larry Craig.

But the woman with whom Edwards broke his marital vows is no mere Monica. Rielle Hunter played partygirl muse to Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis in the '80s, when she was known as Lisa Jo Druck. McInerney, "intrigued and appalled" by her lifestyle, cast the adventurous blond as the central character in his '88 novel *Story of My Life*. Ellis awarded her bit parts in *Glamourama* and *American Psycho*. Perhaps the boyish Edwards has a penchant for Gen X fiction.

As scandal, the Edwards affair is a hat trick—prurient, literary, political. It might even have changed the course of history, if you believe former Hillary Clinton communications director Howard Wolfson. He told ABC News, "I believe we would have won Iowa, and Clinton today would therefore have been the nominee," if only the Obama-besotted media had broken the story sooner. Rumors of Edwards's extracurricular activities were rife during the campaign. Should the press have pried?

Yes, they should have investigated Edwards—and Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain, too. But before scrutinizing private misdeeds, our brethren in big media ought to turn a critical eye to our leaders' foreign-policy fantasies and domestic power lust. If the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* had cared half as much about the truth behind President Bush's Niger uranium claims as the *National Enquirer* cared about John Edwards's sex life, America might have stayed out of a war.

[IRAQ]

WE'LL HELP YOU PACK

Who decides how long American troops must remain in Iraq? Last year at a Rose Garden press conference, President Bush promised to let the Iraqi people make the call: "If they were to say, 'Leave,' we would leave."

That's exactly what they have said, with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—democratically elected, as everybody knows—telling the U.S. to set a timetable for withdrawal.

Iraq's national security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, recently told media outlets that his government is "impatiently waiting" for the complete withdrawal of foreign troops. Iraqis submitted a proposal calling for an exit within