**Fairfield, Iowa: An Unexpected (and Disorienting) Example of a Path toward Sustainability**

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Sitting on the deck of the Sweetwater Bunkhouse in the Abundance EcoVillage listening to an impromptu band comprised of our course instructors and another local musician, I completely lost track of where I was. The vibrancy of the community, the progressive actions taking place there, and the verdant landscape suggested I was anywhere but a small town in the middle of Iowa. But in fact, that’s where I was and I believe I was seeing the potential of the future in the rural community of Fairfield. Fairfield is a town of less than 10,000 people, but among the most vibrant communities I had been in. It is like someone extracted the energy and creativity of places like Madison, Portland or Boulder and concentrated it in the middle of the Iowa corn and soybean fields.

In early June 2013, I spent 5 days in Fairfield to partake in John Ikerd’s and Lonnie Gamble’s Crash Course in Sustainable Economics. We were treated to John’s clear and concise talk about what is needed for an economy to be sustainable and to Lonnie’s intense network of sustainability efforts in the community. We experienced the best of local, organic and seasonal food, a local winery, a community orchard, the local arts walk, farmers market, community arts and business incubator space, local music, urban permaculture, large scale organic greenhouses, sustainable building, spiritual practices, kombucha on tap (my favorite), and eco-villages. We met the Mayor who holds a vision of sustainability and negotiates the possibilities among the community, a state Senator who is campaigning to address climate change, an employee-owner of Sky Factory – a company that embodies principles of empowerment and responsibility while making a profit, an elder who works with the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers, and a profitable, innovative organic dairy farmer who chooses to only sell to his own community for quality control and personal relationship purposes. You can see why I lost track of where I was.

The specifics of what is there are pretty amazing, but of more interest to me is why and how they are there. So, this is my best attempt to capture the answers to these questions. As John Ikerd might say, “this is my truth and you might disagree with it, but it’s what I’ve come to.” So, others may have a different perspective on this and I encourage you to go there and find out for yourself.

Mayor Ed Malloy I think best captured why and how this is the case. He stated that Fairfield is “the expression of individual passion and creativity” that comes from accessing the underlying field of consciousness, which facilitates a connection to one’s self and the rest of nature. Fairfield is home to Maharishi University of Management (MUM). The university was founded on the teaching and principles of the Vedic sage Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, which include the Transcendental Meditation technique and a belief that the “purpose of life is the expansion of happiness, and that every human being can effortlessly unfold his or her infinite potential.” While I don’t ascribe to or advocate for this specific technique, I believe the commonality of meditation and the connection to this universal consciousness is what has created the potential of the Fairfield. All humans have a need for a sense of purpose, which is why we have spiritual practices. Unfortunately, we rarely allow that need to enter into our community decision making and public life. The commonality of meditation has allowed the people of Fairfield to be comfortable with and direct about the need to address this greater sense of purpose in public life. This has had the effect of encouraging people to find their own personal truth through tapping into this greater purpose and living that out in the public sphere. The result: a proliferation and diversity of ways to make a living in ways that enhance life. The city has something to show us: if a city of less than 10,000 people in the middle of the Iowa corn and soybean fields can do this, so can the rest of us. We just need to be honest about what it means to be human, and to use that understanding to create places and policies that reflect and encourage the full human potential.

Below are some of the efforts taking place in Fairfield. All of these are amazing efforts and this isn’t a comprehensive list.

Abundance EcoVillage: [www.abundance-ecovillage.com/](http://www.abundance-ecovillage.com/)

\*The Beauty Shop – Cultural Incubator: [www.iowasource.com/fairfield/2011\_06\_beautyshop.html](http://www.iowasource.com/fairfield/2011_06_beautyshop.html)

Café Paradios (where you can get locally made kombucha on tap): [cafeparadiso.net](http://cafeparadiso.net/)

Cultural District of Fairfield: [www.fairfieldculturaldistrict.org](http://www.fairfieldculturaldistrict.org)

Fairfield Blue Zones Project (public health and longevity): <http://cityoffairfieldiowa.com/index.aspx?nid=237>

Fairfield Go-Green Strategic Plan & Initiatives: [www.fairfieldgogreen.com](http://www.fairfieldgogreen.com); [www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan](http://www.fairfieldiowa.com/2020-fairfield-go-green-strategic-plan)

Green Building Supply: [www.greenbuildingsupply.com/](http://www.greenbuildingsupply.com/)

Ideal Energy (Renewable Energy business): [www.idealenergyinc.com/](http://www.idealenergyinc.com/)

Maharishi University of Management: <http://www.mum.edu/about/>

Maharishi Vedic Organic Greenhouses and Farm: [www.mvccsa.com/](http://www.mvccsa.com/)

MUM Sustainable Living Center: [www.mum.edu/sustainable-living/buildings/sustainable-living-building](http://www.mum.edu/sustainable-living/buildings/sustainable-living-building)

Radiance Dairy: [www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/leopold-letter/2009/fall/keys-success-radiance-dairy-using-nature-model-and-guide](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/news/leopold-letter/2009/fall/keys-success-radiance-dairy-using-nature-model-and-guide)

The Sky Factory: [www.skyfactory.com/about/](http://www.skyfactory.com/about/)

\* To me, this is the most exciting thing happening in Fairfield. I love and believe strongly in grassroots experimentation and innovation involving the arts, food, business, etc., which is what they are doing in this incubator. From my perspective, a community is nowhere near complete without space like this.