



Photograph by Paul Elledge

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Johari Cole

Organic Farmer, Pembroke, Illinois

Providing fresh produce to the inner city

Thirteen years ago, when Johari Cole, 40, first laid eyes on what is now her 45-acre farm in Illinois, the nearest town had no gas station, one convenience store, and mostly dirt roads. But the property itself was an inspiration. Because it had been farmed by African-Americans who historically didn't have access to loans for machines and chemical fertilizers, the land had never been run down or overgrazed. Species of plants and animals that have all but disappeared elsewhere were thriving. A microbiologist and former pharmaceutical company scientist, Cole is a member of the Pembroke Farmers Cooperative and the Pembroke Farming Family, an African-American organic farmers' collective that supplies fresh meat, vegetables, and grains to inner-city greenmarkets as well as to the best Chicago restaurants. Sustainable farming, she says, is "just the right thing to do." To learn more about sustainable farming in the Midwest, go to www.sustainusa.org.

Quotes from Johari:

One of the most sacred things to me is that my children can run out into the garden and pick anything out there and eat it. I feel so good about that. I don't have to say, 'No! Don't touch it!'

Sustainable farming is not an easy thing to do. It's hard work when you have to get up early in the morning and the dew is still on your crops and you're knocking bugs off by hand. But it's such a rewarding lifestyle at the end of the day. You feel good, and you can rest assured that you're doing something for the next generation as well.

If I could tell women to do one thing for the planet, I would say, 'Love yourself unconditionally,' because you'll be able to laugh at yourself if you make mistakes. If you

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don't get something just right that's OK. Learn to love yourself unconditionally because when you do that it's easier to love the world.

Ice cream is my non-organic sin. I love Ben and Jerry's, so if I can get it I do. But if that's not available and if I can't find anything organic, I'm sorry. I'm not a perfectionist.

People take the insects and the smallest creatures for granted and don't realize that they're just as significant as we are. Even more so, because they are our telltale signs of how we're practicing our own lives-they're like a reflection of us. Seeing the frogs disappear, that's made me unsteady for the last few years.

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