SLOWMONEY

STATE OF THE SOIL

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Remarks at Food + Enterprise

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THANKS to Derek and Slow Money NYC and NRDC and the other Food + Enterprise partners for inviting me. I started thinking about these remarks last month, a few days after the President's State of the Union address. I couldn't help but think: The State of our Union may be strong—measured in terms of job growth, the stock market, shale oil and aircraft carriers—but the State of Civilization, the State of Public Discourse, the State of our Soil is weak.

I realize that in today's fast world—fast food, fast money, fast information—a few weeks is a long time, a month an eternity, and who can even describe the immense duration of a fiscal quarter or a season. In today's fast world, President Obama's State of the Union is long gone. But in the spirit of all things slow, I'm going to go back all the way to the 1960s and 1970s, to a few Kennedys and things of a Presidential nature said back then. And then to the roots of the modern social investment movement, with a brief aside on Greek mythology and the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Along the way, I'll give you an overview of the last five years of Slow Money activities—the $40 million that's gone to over 400 small food enterprises via dozens of Slow Money local networks and investment clubs.

I guess you could say I offer these remarks as a kind of Earthworm's Meta-Economic Non-Reply to the State of the Union. You know, there was a Republican reply. There should be an Earthworm's Meta-Economic Non-Reply.

I say "Non-Reply" because it is more of a revolt than a reply. A revolt against the idea that we cannot have a nuanced, authentic public conversation about what's broken and how to begin fixing things from the ground up. A revolt against the forgetting and the distractions that doom us to repeat history and steal the future.

"Meta-economic" in the sense that E.F. Schumacher, who wrote *Small Is Beautiful* in 1973 and to whom I'll refer again later, was the first 20th-century industrial economist to realize that economics itself was the problem, that the quantification of economics was preventing us from seeing what was happening to our households, our neighborhoods, our bioregions and the planet as a whole.

Disclaimer: I am not a Democrat. I am not a Republican. I am not a political animal. I'm just an earthworm. An earthworm in the soil of a restorative economy. An earthworm who greatly prefers to speak off the cuff, but who today has prepared these slightly more formal remarks, prompted by those of our President last month.

So, here goes my Earthworm's Meta-Economic Non-Reply to the State of the Union.

* * * *

THE State of the Soil is weak.

We are strong in terms of tillage, but weak in terms of fertility. We are strong measured in chemical and mechanical power—millions and millions of tons of NPK, petrochemicals, herbicides and pesticides and the sophisticated technologies to apply them—but we are weak in terms of soil erosion, weak in terms of our connection to the land, weak in terms of sense of place. Our industrial systems are taking carbon from the soil instead of building carbon in the soil. We have less and less organic matter, and fewer and fewer people who know what it feels, smells or tastes like.

This is a crisis in its own right, but it is also a spoke in the wheel of a larger crisis. Some might opine that food and agriculture are not merely a spoke, but are actually the hub, because if we don't get agriculture right, then we can't get industrialization and consumerism and globalization and urbanization right, and so, we can't ever really get at the great systemic crisis of climate change and the increasing dysfunction of our institutions.

This is what *New York Times* writer Mark Bittman was getting at earlier this month when he wrote: "The world of food and agriculture symbolizes most of what's gone wrong in the United States." He went on to pose the following question:

> *Is contemporary American agriculture a system for nourishing people and providing a livelihood for farmers? Or is it one for denuding the nation's topsoil while poisoning land, water, workers and consumers and enriching corporations? Our collective actions would indicate that our principles favor the latter; that has to change.*

Surely, things in the food system have to change. But what also has to change is the way we frame things in overly simplistic, Either/Or terms. Nourishers vs. denuders. Disempowered consumers vs. greedy corporations. We must resist these labels and the overly simplistic world of Us vs. Them. If we do not resist, then our conversations will be little more than tribal squabbling. Or worse. They will lead to full-blown righteous struggles between good and evil.

I am not a nourisher and you are not a denuder. I am not a disempowered consumer and you are not a greedy corporation. We are all investors, that is, we are all directly or indirectly *invested in* the systems we hope to change, and our position vis-à-vis these systems and one another is way more nuanced than Us vs. Them labels. Our intentions and beliefs and hopes and imagination are way more nuanced, way more beautifully ambiguous and full of meaning than that. Our interdependence is way more nuanced and beautiful than that.

For instance, it is a certainty that some in this room have investments in Monsanto or Exxon or McDonald's, whether you know it or not, through one of your index funds or mutual funds or retirement accounts. That doesn't make you greedy or evil. It doesn't make you a denuder. But it does raise the stakes in terms of the need to avoid the blame game.

Us vs. Them is to imagination what Roundup is to weeds. And Twinkies are to nutrition.

Happily, later in that same *New York Times* piece, Bittman wrote:

> *Let's try to make sense of where the world is now instead of relying on outdated doctrines like 'capitalism' and 'socialism' created by people who had no idea what the 21st century would look like.*

I couldn't agree more. This is our urgent task. To get beyond the false political and economic choices of bygone eras. We can't find our way through the problems of the 21st century if we are wearing 19th- and 20th-century goggles.

Here's how E.F. Schumacher put it:

> *We have become confused as to what our convictions are. The great ideas of the nineteenth century*

"If we don't get agriculture right, then we can't get industrialization and consumerism and globalization and urbanization right."

may fill our minds in one way or another, but our hearts do not believe in them all the same. Mind and heart are at war with one another, not, as is commonly asserted, reason and faith. Our reason has become beclouded by an extraordinary, blind and unreasonable faith in a set of fantastic and life-destroying ideas inherited from the nineteenth century. It is the foremost task of our reason to recover a truer faith than that.

Now, you may not have thought you were signing up for an exploration into the relationship between reason and faith, or into what comes after capitalism and socialism, when you put on your scarf this morning. But that's precisely what is needed if we are going to preserve and restore the soil, and it is precisely what we are doing every time we make an investment in a small, local or organic food enterprise.

The word "small" is key here, because we are not undertaking some great project of system redesign at the level of macro-economic theory or ideology or national policy. We are undertaking it directly and with the utmost pragmatism, one small food enterprise at a time, one CSA at a time, one seed company at a time, one rooftop urban farm at a time, one less-eutrophied aquifer at a time, one fewer Big Mac at a time, one soil-building investment at a time.

While Schumacher was writing *Small Is Beautiful* back in the '70s, the poet Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry's great friend, was putting his own spin on the need to get beyond outmoded economic ideas of earlier days:

We had a sudden feeling, he wrote, that we had finally broken through to a new freedom of expression . . . and gone beyond the tedious and pointless arguments of Bolshevik versus capitalist that were (and still are) draining the imaginative life out of so many intellectuals in the world.

Snyder continued:

Creatures who have traveled with us through the ages are now apparently doomed, as their habitat—and the old, old habitat of humans—falls before the slow-motion explosion of expanding world economies. If the lad or lass is among us who knows where the secret heart of this Growth Monster is hidden, let them please tell us where to shoot the arrow that will slow it down.

I've spent 40 years shooting arrows at the heart of this Growth Monster. Which, you may not be surprised to hear, has led me, but with rather startling slowness, I might add, to ask: Wait a minute—does the Growth Monster even *have* a heart? What is it I've been shooting at?

Does the Growth Monster even have a heart? There's a question fit for a Greek mythologist. Or a Hungarian economist.

One of the 20th century's most important, but relatively unknown economists was a big fan of the ancient Greeks. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen argued that the Second Law of Thermodynamics trumps economics. That is, the rules of economics must operate within the laws of physics and nature. He also felt that modern-day economists had little over ancient Greek philosophers: "For better or worse," Georgescu-Roegen stated, "we have not yet discovered one single problem of understanding that the Greek philosophers did not formulate."

Gary Snyder's evocation of the Growth Monster may not rise to the level of Greek mythology, but I have a feeling it would have made Georgescu-Roegen smile:

If the lad or lass is among us who knows where the secret heart of this Growth Monster is hidden, let them please tell us where to shoot the arrow that will slow it down.

I hope we can all agree that the deep humanism of these words goes beyond politics and economics.

The problem we face is bigger than politics, bigger than economics, bigger than greedy investment bankers vs. over-reaching government bureaucrats.

We face, no, we are all *a part of*, the Growth Monster—the imponderables of a global machine that seems destined to become more and more complex, more and more dependent upon larger and larger political and financial institutions, more and more in the grips of faster and faster technological change. We do not know how to slow down. Most econophiles and technophiles do not even *want* to slow down, fearing that the only alternative to faster and faster must be recession or depression and a terrifying downward spiral toward something worse than purgatory: a lower standard of living.

In the recent book, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*, by George Marshall, Nobel laureate economist Daniel Kahneman is interviewed, and he says: "I'm extremely skeptical that we can cope with climate change . . . No amount of psychological awareness will overcome people's reluctance to lower their standard of living."

There's a semester's worth, perhaps even a career's worth, of study and conversation to be had around the meaning of the words *standard of living*.

I wouldn't be here today, I don't think any of us would be here today, if we didn't think Daniel Kahneman was wrong. There is not a binary trade-off between standard of living and psychological awareness. It is possible to assert the primacy of the qualitative against the reductionism of the quantitative.

If you spend more of your household budget on food, and you get food of higher quality, food that is fresher, more biodiverse, more local, less tainted with chemicals, and the provision of which has done less damage to soil, water and air, is your standard of living higher or lower? Italians spend on average 14.8 percent of their household budget on food, compared with an average of 6.6 percent in the U.S. Most economists would interpret this in only one way: Italy's standard of living is lower than that in the U.S., because after buying food Italians have less money to spend on other consumer goods. A meta-economic earthworm would interpret this in an entirely different way: Italians recognize the centrality of food to culture and so have not rushed to trade in culture for commodities.

This is some of what E.F. Schumacher was after in *Small Is Beautiful*. And unless you believe that increased consumption is synonymous with improved well being, that there is no such thing as too much consumption, or mindless consumption, or destructive consumption, then you will find Schumacher's work thought-provoking, maybe even inspiring. So, if you haven't read *Small Is Beautiful*, do it. Some of the particulars are dated, but the underlying thinking is timeless.

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FOR an earthworm, I seem to have gotten pretty far afield from the President's State of the Union address. So, let's return.

You will remember that in his address, the President took a wildly positive tack, saying that the worst is behind us, that it's time to turn a new page on the economy and terrorism.

It was hard to listen to such a simplistic narrative. But there it was. In with optimism, out with pessimism. Turn the page. So, we have to ask: Is our public discourse really so shallow that we have to reduce everything to over-simplified binary choices? And then we have to answer: Yep, our public discourse is this shallow. The State of our Public Discourse is weak.

Certainly, we can cut the President and all the surrounding punditry and media noisemakers some slack. The ether in which heads of state and multinational CEOs live and through which trillions of dollars zoom is destined to turn everything into a sound bite.

Here on the ground, it falls to us to improve the State of our Public Discourse. Or, put in less stuffy terms, we need to talk. We really, really need to talk. We need to do deals, sure, but on the road to and from the deals we need to talk. We need to make time for the wonderful, rich conversation that is emerging in and around and through us. This is a kind of soil. A kind of fertility. It is like organic matter. It is the stuff of healthy culture, a culture working to heal itself, a culture working to reassert the primacy of relationships over transactions.

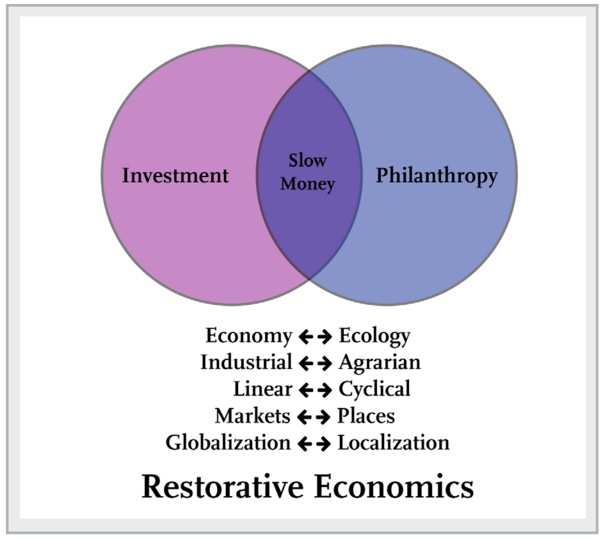
Around the time of the President's State of the Union, some of this rich conversation made its way into my inbox. It was a message from Melissa Berman, the president of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and she was quoting F. Scott Fitzgerald:

> *"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see things as hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise."*

I found this message very encouraging, but not, perhaps, for the reasons Melissa intended. The two opposed ideas to which my thoughts immediately went were not pessimism and optimism, but investing and philanthropy.

The 20th century taught us that these were opposed ideas, presenting us with a binary situation: First, you maximize profits on the investment side; then you take some of the proceeds and use it for philanthropy. Never the twain shall meet.

But in the 21st century, facing threats of all sorts—deep, structural threats, from climate change to wealth inequality to political gridlock to terrorism—we are learning the urgent lesson that old notions of investing and philanthropy are inadequate.



This graphic illustrates part of the great work of the 21st century: reintegrating investing and philanthropy, freeing our capital from the confines of outdated notions of fiduciary responsibility and unleashing major new sources of capital to support a great cultural shift.

The entire social investing field—that started, in its modern incarnation, with the Sullivan Principles and the movement to oppose apartheid by divesting from companies doing business in South Africa, and that has now evolved down through socially responsible investing and mission-related investing and program-related investing and triple-bottom-line investing to something that is being mainstreamed as *impact investing*—this entire emergence of social investing over the past few decades can be thought of as the move to hold the opposed ideas of philanthropy and investing in mind and still be able to function.

It's interesting that over roughly the same time period, the venture capital industry burst onto the scene. John Doerr, one of that industry's recognized leaders, famously has referred to venture capital as "the greatest legal accumulation of wealth in history." This is a good

"We need to make time for the wonderful, rich conversation that is emerging in and around and through us. This is a kind of soil."

epithet for the whole 20th century, which produced the world's first 1,500 or so billionaires and grew the global economy from around $1 trillion in 1900 to $77 trillion today, along with hundreds of trillions of dollars of somewhat alchemical financial instruments going by the relatively innocuous name "derivatives."

The greatest legal accumulation of wealth in history. To do this, we focused on growth and innovation and throughput and consumption and extraction and manufacture and accumulation. Not so much on the whos of accumulation or the hows of extraction and manufacture. But on growth and consumption and extraction. To grow from $1 trillion to $77 trillion in little more than a century, you must live in a binary world: create as much wealth as you can now, worry about philanthropy later.

Let's just say this made sense in 1900, perhaps even 1950, perhaps even, say, 1968. But once we saw the first picture of the earth rising over the moon, shouldn't all that have begun to change?

Shouldn't the finiteness of the planet immediately have changed the way we thought about consumption and waste and limits?

In its own way, that's where social investing came in. It was the beginning of the process of coming to grips with limits. But it was a very halting, constrained beginning. We recognized global limits, but we wouldn't quite recognize personal limits. We recognized global limits, but we wouldn't quite recognize limits on wealth creation. And we certainly wouldn't do anything that might limit the profitability of any of our investments.

So began a case of global cognitive dissonance so deep, so convoluted that we still haven't gotten over it.

It wasn't as if no one was trying. It just so happens that in the same fateful year, 1968, that Apollo 8 brought us this image, Robert F. Kennedy had run for President. I bring it up today, because while Bobby Kennedy never got to give a State of the Union address, he said something quite remarkable on the campaign trail that warrants inclusion in today's State of the Soil address. It was pretty much the opposite of President Obama's attempt to simply turn the page on economic malaise. Bobby Kennedy stared the Growth Monster in the face, and this is what he saw:

> *We will find neither national purpose nor personal satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress, in an endless amassing of worldly goods. We cannot measure national spirit by the Dow Jones Average, nor national achievement by the Gross National Product. For the Gross National Product includes air pollution, and ambulances to clear our highways from carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and jails for the people who break them. The Gross National Product includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm and missiles and nuclear warheads ... It includes ... the broadcasting of television programs which glorify violence to sell goods to our children.*
>
> *And if the Gross National Product includes all this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry, or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity*

of our public officials … The Gross National Product measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile, and it can tell us everything about America—except why we are proud to be Americans.

If we are going to have a nuanced, authentic public conversation about what is broken and how to fix it, then we need more words like these. We need to return to these words again and again. We need to stare the Growth Monster in the face.

Or, you could say, we need to stare the pig in the face.

Those of you who know me know that I always use this slide. If I were only going to use one slide, this would be it. Staring the pig in the face. The capitalist pig. The free range pig. This is a Niman Ranch hog, on Paul Willis's farm in Thornton, Iowa. I can't look up close at this pig and not think: *How is my money affecting other living things? Where can I invest in a way that will support a food system that is humane, appropriate scale and healthy?* I was fortunate enough to have a small investment in Niman Ranch a number of years ago, and I hope you all will enjoy looking for similarly interesting opportunities as you get to know the food enterprises here with us today.

Staring the pig in the face. Staring the Growth Monster in the face. Staring the DJIA in the face.

Taking on the DJIA while campaigning for President was one thing. Taking on the military industrial complex while actually in office, quite another. So, as we consider vision of the Presidential kind, let's also consider the words of Bobby's brother, JFK. In June 1963, in a speech at American University, JFK dared to say, at the height of the Cold War, that the enemy wasn't the Soviet Union; the enemy was nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation. It's hard to convey the heretical quality of the message at that point in time. The military industrial complex, which President Eisenhower had so eloquently warned about as he left office a few years earlier, was charging ahead on our nuclear arsenal and preparing for a major conflagration in Vietnam. The Soviets were establishing missile bases in Cuba. And here's what JFK said:

Too many of us think peace is impossible. Too many think it is unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable—that mankind is doomed—that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.

We need not accept that view. Our problems are man-made. Therefore, they can be solved by man.

To my mind, there is a straight line from JFK's comments on nuclear proliferation, on our being "gripped by forces that we cannot control"—a straight line to Warren Buffett's comments, 50 years later, about "financial weapons of mass destruction." That's what Buffett calls derivatives. Financial weapons of mass destruction.

Both Kennedy and Buffett are referring to a perilous imbalance of means and ends. Both are talking about the downside of technological innovation and power. Both are talking about the triumph of the machine and the disempowerment of individuals. Both are talking about the promise of greater security turned inside out. Both are talking about our need to exercise restraint, to regain control over powerful systems that have taken on a life of their own. And, of course, both are talking about the violence, direct and indirect, of the modern economy.

Let's take a look at a financial weapon of mass destruction. Here's one of the formulas that is the basis for derivatives:

$$C_\rho(u, v) = \Phi_\rho\left(\Phi^{-1}(u), \Phi^{-1}(v)\right)$$

Such formulas were developed to reduce risk. But is it any surprise that even as they did so for individual transactions, the abstractness and complexity resulting from the widespread application of such formulas actually increased risks to the system as a whole?

There is something daunting, to be sure, in the complexity of such financial razzmatazz. It's hard for us to imagine that we can actually do anything about the DJIA or the Growth Monster or financial weapons of mass destruction. But that free-range Niman Ranch pig? We can do something about that pig. We can stare the pig in the face, and we can do something about it.

Which is just what I and thousands of fellow Slow Money folks have been doing for the past five years or so. We've been staring this pig in the face, feeling the love, the *biophilia*, the hope, the affection, and wanting to invest accordingly.

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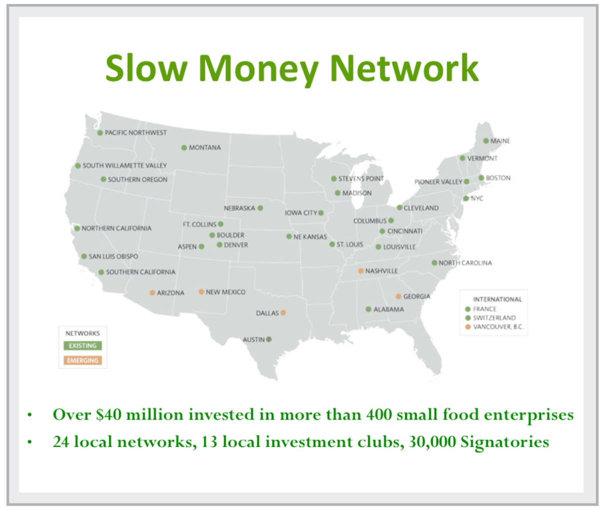


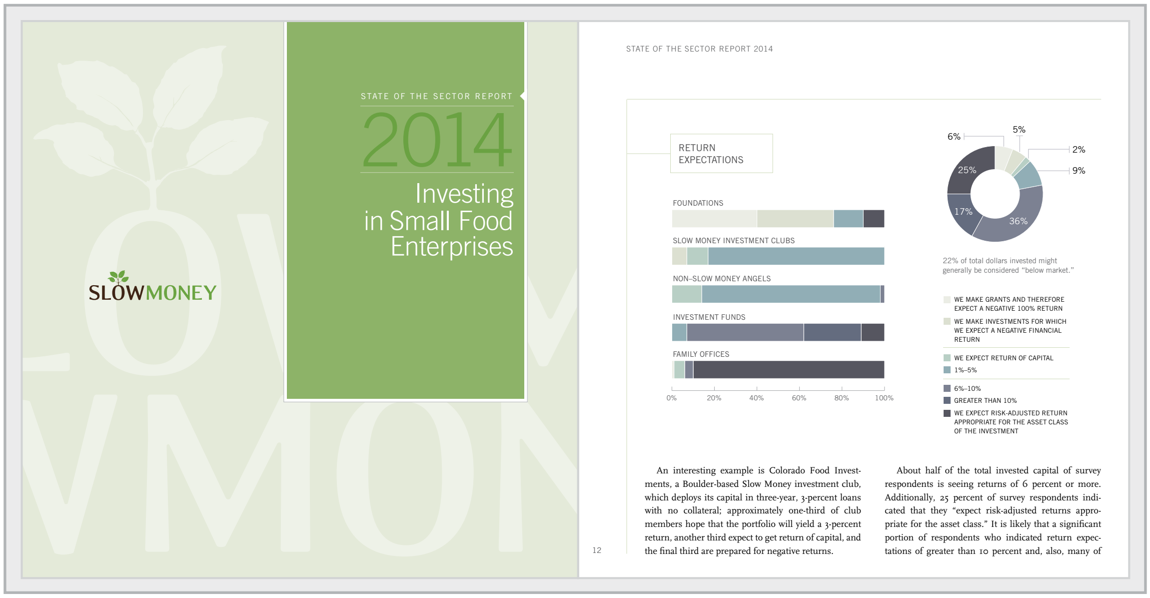
HERE'S what we've been up to over the past five years. This slide shows Slow Money local networks and investment clubs and a bit of summary data. This has all happened since mid-2010. My book, *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money*, came out in December 2008, but the real action started in June 2010, after our second national gathering. Some of you were there, in Shelburne Farms, Vermont. As you can see, in 2015 we've got 24 local networks, 13 investment clubs and counting. More than 30,000 people have signed the Slow Money Principles. This has all happened without any formal, centralized intermediation. It's all individuals and self-organized local networks.

We are now beginning to have enough data to start addressing the question of metrics. Our State of the Sector Report, which we published in October, is a beginning. Remember, this has been, in the early going, all about getting the flow of capital started. It will take a few more years to begin seeing how things are working out on the back end of the investments.

I, for one, am very careful not to rush into metrics. We need to maintain a healthy balance between the transactional piece and the relationship-building piece. As I said, we are not providing formal, centralized and monetized intermediary services, so by definition our metrics are not going to be the same as fund metrics.

The State of the Sector Report is presented in two sections: the statistical analysis of a survey, followed by stories from entrepreneurs and investors, in their own words.

The survey was conducted by California Environmental Associates, with data provided by 42 angel investors, family offices, foundations and investment funds. We analyzed their investments, along with those in our Slow Money investment database, over the period 2009–2013. The report covers $293 million of investments in 968 deals.



The entrepreneurs' and investors' stories are rich. I particularly commend to your attention to the contribution of Claude Arpels, who is on the Board of Slow Money NYC. He refers to the economy as "squirrel proofed." Really. You have to check it out.

I want to say a few things on the subject of metrics, since, of course, questions about how much money we are going to make, how we understand the boundary zone between investing and philanthropy, the quantification of risk and the quantification of so-called "non-financial"—that is, social and environmental—impacts, they all loom large.

I believe the entire triple-bottom-line and impact investing process is flawed to the extent that it is confined to achieving so-called competitive market returns. Having been around this process for 30 years, I know that what I'm saying here raises hackles. But these are fiduciary hackles, which is the whole point. If you are a fiduciary, if you are utilizing fiduciary guidelines to judge your investments, then you are by definition going to have trouble doing certain things. Like supporting the next million small organic farmers, a.k.a. a revolution for the food system and for local economies. This is simply not going to be an easy way to make money. But just as simply, this is something of tremendous cultural and biological and entrepreneurial value.

So, what do we do? Keep using the old metrics, adding social and environmental factors on top of them, and hoping for a different outcome? Or, do we imagine new ways to value relationships, *whether or not they can produce competitive returns or, even, be easily quantified?*

Imagination is vital. With imagination comes affection and with affection comes neighborliness and with neighborliness comes mutuality and with mutuality comes shared risk. I'm using affection here, in the Wendell Berry sense of the term, as in his Jefferson lecture "It All Turns on Affection."

Think about it. If your neighbor is a farmer and the barn burns down, and you are in a position to lend them money to rebuild the barn, what rate of return would

"With imagination comes affection and with affection comes neighborliness and with neighborliness comes mutuality and with mutuality comes shared risk."

you charge? How would you assess the risk? What would success look like? I've asked this question to many, many folks, and they all say, to a person, "I'd just be happy to get my money back." This is about innate value, about relationship, about directly experienced mutuality. It is about community, not about financial markets.

But as soon as you have a portfolio of "neighbors' barns," that is, it's not just you and it's not just your actual neighbor, as soon as you have a portfolio of investments and a handful of other investors, even if you are all from the same town or same county, then fiduciary arithmetic rushes in.

It's critical to remember that a fiduciary is someone who is responsible for managing *someone else's money*. So, it is more than a little interesting that we let the fiduciary mentality gain such complete dominance over all of our investment decisions, even when we are managing our own money or when, as a small group of quasi-neighbors, we are aiming to use a small pool of capital in a more neighborly way.

This is why I announced at the Slow Money national gathering two years ago that I wanted to be a . . .

food • ish • iary

But that's another story . . .

On a more left-brain note, consider the following formula:

$$mc = \frac{1}{p+s}$$

Metrics and certification, *mc*, that's certification as in third-party certification, are inversely related to proximity, *p*, and scale, *s*. That is, when you are in direct relationship with a small, comprehensible enterprise, your need for metrics and third-party certification is lessened.

Now, I'm not sure if this is a real formula. But I am sure it is a real idea.

Not all real ideas require numbers, and not all important metrics require formulas. Some of the most important metrics are wildly simple and have nothing whatsoever to do with any one transaction. For instance, how many people here think that the number of earthworms per acre of farmland might be an important metric?

In the major study *Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century*, sponsored by the Gates and Kellogg foundations, there is an appendix that presents a case study of Thompson Family Farm in Boone County, Iowa. This case study contains some interesting earthworm metrics.

Q: What is the average earthworm population per acre on conventionally farmed land in Boone County?
A: 19,000.

Q: What is the average earthworm population per acre on third-generation organic Thompson Family Farm?
A. 1.3 million

These metrics are extremely important, aren't they? It's wonderful that someone took the time to measure the earthworm populations and that these measurements were included in that major study. But where would such metrics ever appear in relation to a particular investment? What is the market value of those 1.3 million earthworms?

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ALL of this finally comes down to getting some of our money into the hands of farmers and food entrepreneurs. One of Wes Jackson's neighbors referred to farmers as "heroic grunts," and I think the term should also apply to investors who have the gumption to share risk in the name of food, soil, place, health and culture.

Below are some of the farmers and food entrepreneurs in whom Slow Money folks are actually investing.

Slow Money has also taken a small stab at the crowdfunding side of things, but revolving around our events, because we are focused on connecting real people in real rooms (sometimes tents in farm fields). Meetings like this one. We consider direct local knowledge and face-to-face relationships critical. At the same time, of course, we want to tap the power of the Internet where we can.

We conducted our first BEETCOIN campaign in the run up to, and at, our last national gathering, in Louisville, Kentucky this past November. We raised $100,000 from 373 online investors and the 850 Louisville attendees and gave three-year 0% loans to three recipients.

The winner, Bauman's Cedar Valley Farms of Garnett, Kansas, got $60,000 and took the momentum and media attention home and added hundreds of thousands of dollars of new investment in their family poultry processing operation and GMO-free feed mill. This was a wonderful result, and we look forward to exploring future BEETCOIN opportunities.

Is the more than $40 million of investment in over 400 deals a lot or a little? It's not much at all by Wall Street or venture capital standards. But it's a significant start if looked at through the lens of the soil.

Paul Hawken has said: "We humans have yet to create anything that is as complex and well-designed as the interactions of microorganisms in a cubic foot of rich soil." He could have said a gram of topsoil, because in a single gram of fertile topsoil live billions of bacteria and actinomycetes, hundreds of thousands of fungi and algae, and tens of thousands of protozoa, nematodes and other microfauna. That's in a single gram of fertile soil.

A little humility is in order, isn't it, in the presence of such teeming and still relatively mysterious life? Leonardo Da Vinci said 500 years ago, "We know more about the movement of the celestial bodies than we do about the soil beneath our feet." This is still true today.

So, when the UN designates 2015 the International Year of Soils, which it has, we've got to know that this is about a lot more than food and agriculture. It's about the trajectory we set ourselves on, as a species, as a project in civilization, when we shifted away from hunting and gathering and settled down around plots of wheat. A trajectory that has brought us breakfast bowls full of GMOs and portfolios full of derivatives and a worldview that seems content to think that fiduciary responsibility and intelligent investing happen out there, in the air, in cyberspace, in moon shots, in distant markets, in portfolios, in computer formulas that are too clever for their own good. What kind of International Year of Soils can this worldview really enjoy?

What needs to be done is clear. To play our role in the Year of Soils, investors have to roll up our sleeves and put our hands into the soil—the actual soil and the soil of a restorative economy.

We need to plant the seeds of the nurture capital industry.

We need to bring some of our money back down to earth.

We need to take a little of our money out of *there*—those gross abstractions called global capital markets and computer algorithms—and put it to work *here*—near where we live, in things that we understand, starting with food.

Before I conclude, I want to call out two groups who are in a position to lead the charge on all of this.

The first is the baby boomers. We boomers came of age during the first go-round of modern environmentalism, when that picture of the earth rising over the moon first came into our homes, when the Kennedys gave us Hope and Change before it was called Hope and Change. Now we are the beneficiaries of what financial advisors often refer to as the Great Transfer of Wealth—trillions of dollars of intergenerational wealth, all tied one way or another to the greatest legal accumulation of wealth in history and the greatest legal liberation of carbon from the earth's crust in history.

The second group is the millennials, who are growing up in a networked world and for whom the phrase "the American dream" seems anachronistic and 1950s-ish. Climate change is as intuitively obvious to them as Uber.

Many beautiful partnerships between these and other stakeholders are in the offing. The communities we are building and the culture we are nurturing are as important as the deals we are doing and the markets we are making.

As we proceed, RFK and JFK and E.F. Schumacher and Gary Snyder are here with us. I haven't said much about Wendell Berry today, but surely he is here, too. So are the earthworms in the fields of Thompson Family Farm in Boone County, Iowa. The Growth Monster is here. Adam Smith's Invisible Hand is here, too, wearing the veils of free markets and fiduciary responsibility as if they were royal capes. All of them are here, adding their spirits to these festivities. All are welcome.

And there's FarmWorks in Nova Scotia, Lucky Penny Farm in Ohio, the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust, Bauman's Cedar Valley Farms in Kansas, Greenling in Austin and Sustainable Settings in Colorado, Zoë Bradbury farming two acres with horsepower near the Oregon coast, and Sole Food Farms in Vancouver—these and so many more are with us here today in spirit. As are those of many enterprises that did not succeed. Parish Hall and MooMilk and Source Local and Grant Family Farms. Not every venture succeeds, but the vitality of all these efforts finds its way back into the soil for the benefit of all.

So, let's have a wonderful day or so of deal-doing and shared learning, and let's celebrate that which we are undertaking together—the joyful, sometimes daunting, often risky, but always rewarding process of exploring the relationships between food, money, health, soil, culture.

May our discourse be robust, our transactions fruitful and the soil of our imaginations fertile.

Woody Tasch
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