

## It's time to continue our journey . . .

Thomas Jefferson reminded us that the Constitution of the United States should be rewritten every 19 years. He believed that every new generation needed to determine its own rules of governance, not live by the rules of past generations. The world, he said, “belongs to the living, not to the dead.”

Of course, Jefferson did not mean that we should disregard the past, only that we not become imprisoned by it. His insight reminds us that every institution needs to periodically review its mode of operation if it is to continue serving people.

We are all poised between memory and hope. Memory provides us with perspective—the basis for making judgments about the future. Hope provides us with incentive—the motivation to engage the challenges and opportunities of the future.

I have been given the task of leading the Leopold Center into the next decade. It is an awesome responsibility. The challenges facing agriculture and the environment are overwhelming, but so are the opportunities. I am aware that the Leopold Center is in a unique position to face those challenges and take advantage of those opportunities. The Center is located in Iowa, the heartland of American agriculture. It has in its short history developed an international reputation for sound, careful work. And it has a mandate from the Iowa Legislature to promote a sustainable agriculture guided by the principles set forth by Aldo Leopold. A better combination of circumstances for affecting the future course of agriculture hardly could be imagined.

But the task will not be easy. We do not all agree on the course we should take to fashion a brighter future. This is to be expected because we are in the midst of major cultural shifts. We have not yet moved beyond the industrial era. At the same time, we are in the thick of the information

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era as we enter a new biological era. There is no agreed-upon collective memory to inform our judgments and no collective vision to guide our aspirations for the future.

In an effort to determine how the Leopold Center can best serve the people of Iowa in the coming years, the Advisory Board last April began a process of reviewing the Center's work. On July 21, the Center hosted an all-day forum to get a clearer perspective on “big picture” issues in sustainable agriculture. Part of this newsletter is devoted to what we heard during that convocation.

In the months ahead, we will develop an outline for the Center's future operations that is consistent with our mission and mandate, and conduct listening sessions throughout the state to obtain feedback from the citizens of Iowa. Subsequently, we will fashion a course of action for the Center for the next decade, using our collective memories to give us perspective and hope to give us the incentive to carry out these plans.

We will keep everyone informed

through the *Leopold Letter*, our Web site, and other forms of communication that seem appropriate. We invite everyone to become part of the process. We already have received thoughtful comments from the July 21 meeting.

In the Spring 1999 issue of the *Leopold Letter*, Dennis Keeney reminded us of the following:

*Iowa is a young land and the Leopold Center is a young organization. Both have much unfinished business.*

How true! Implicit in his comment is the fact that if the Leopold Center is successful in fulfilling its mandate, we will put ourselves out of business. I can think of no better goal for the Leopold Center than to foster an agriculture that is so “economically viable,” so “ecologically sound” and so “socially just” that the Leopold Center and other sustainable agriculture centers elsewhere are no longer needed. Business finished!

*Dennis Keeney*



**Paul Johnson, who once directed the state's department of natural resources, discusses future directions in agriculture with Fred Kirschenmann during lunch at the July 21 forum.**