



Sowing Seeds in the Desert: Natural Farming, Global Restoration, and Ultimate Food Security

By Masanobu Fukuoka

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The earth is in great peril, due to the corporatization of agriculture, the rising climate crisis, and the ever-increasing levels of global poverty, starvation, and desertification on a massive scale. This present condition of global trauma is not "natural," but a result of humanity's destructive actions. And, according to Masanobu Fukuoka, it is reversible. We need to change not only our methods of earth stewardship, but also the very way we think about the relationship between human beings and nature.

Fukuoka grew up on a farm on the island of Shikoku in Japan. As a young man he worked as a customs inspector for plants going into and out of the country. This was in the 1930s when science seemed poised to create a new world of abundance and leisure, when people fully believed they could improve upon nature by applying scientific methods and thereby reap untold rewards. While working there, Fukuoka had an insight that changed his life forever. He returned to his home village and applied this insight to developing a revolutionary new way of farming that he believed would be of great benefit to society. This method, which he called "natural farming," involved working with, not in opposition to, nature.

Fukuoka's inspiring and internationally best-selling book, *The One-Straw Revolution* was first published in English in 1978. In this book, Fukuoka described his philosophy of natural farming and why he came to farm the way he did. *One-Straw* was a huge success in the West, and spoke directly to the growing movement of organic farmers and activists seeking a new way of life. For years after its publication, Fukuoka traveled around the world spreading his teachings and developing a devoted following of farmers seeking to get closer to the truth of nature.

Sowing Seeds in the Desert, a summation of those years of travel and research, is Fukuoka's last major work-and perhaps his most important. Fukuoka spent years working with people and organizations in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Europe,

and the United States, to prove that you could, indeed, grow food and regenerate forests with very little irrigation in the most desolate of places. Only by greening the desert, he said, would the world ever achieve true food security.

This revolutionary book presents Fukuoka's plan to rehabilitate the deserts of the world using natural farming, including practical solutions for feeding a growing human population, rehabilitating damaged landscapes, reversing the spread of desertification, and providing a deep understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature. Fukuoka's message comes right at the time when people around the world seem to have lost their frame of reference, and offers us a way forward.

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Editorial Review

Review

Kirkus Reviews-

From the late author of bestseller *The One Straw Revolution* (1978) comes a similar book about a philosophical approach to natural farming. "The fundamental concept of a natural farm," writes Fukuoka (*The Natural Way of Farming*, 1985, etc.), "begins with intuitively grasping nature's original form, where many varieties of plants and animals live together as a harmonious whole, joyfully and in mutual benefit." In this English translation of the author's last work (first published in Japan in 1996), he decries the "indiscriminate deforestation and large-scale agriculture carried out in order to support the materialistic cultures of the developed countries." This process has created a condition called "desertification," the inability of the soil to grow anything. Because humans have lost their connection with nature, Fukuoka advocates foregoing harmful modern methods of farming in favor of a simpler approach. Based primarily on the success of his farm in Japan, the author believes the solution lies in aerial distribution of a large variety of plants via clay seed pellets, the use of cover crops, and a no-tilling approach to the soil. By seeding a wide variety of species in the desert, nature will select those plants best suited for a particular location. These plants will flourish, drawing water from deep within the earth and thereby allowing other plants and trees to prosper. Taking his philosophy to Africa, India and the United States, among other places, Fukuoka demonstrated that, given sufficient time, seeding fallow earth with vegetables, plants and trees created a lush setting. More a spiritual analysis of farming methods than a hands-on approach, the book still provides viable and simple solutions to the world's increased need for productive land. An enlightened method for reclaiming the barren soils of the world.

Booklist-

The vision of the late Japanese farmer and philosopher Fukuoka, a pioneer in natural farming techniques and author of the now classic *The One-Straw Revolution* (1978), extends far beyond agriculture. In his final book, a far-reaching treatise on 'earth stewardship,' he considers dragonflies, Darwin, and even a meeting with Einstein's niece as he reflects on the best possible future for human society. At times Fukuoka's prose can be striking in its simplicity as when he writes, 'In nature there are no beneficial or harmful insects,' and furthermore, 'this is a human construct akin to saying the right hand is good and the left hand is bad.' Fukuoka never wastes a word or thought, insisting the reader consider all aspects of how we grow our food everywhere in the world and how the food industry manipulates supply and demand for gross profit in ways both economically and socially damaging. Fukuoka's techniques have been and still are world-changing; the challenge now is to continue practicing them without the master here to lead the way.

ForeWord Reviews-

Small-scale and urban farming as well as sustainable living and organic food purchasing are so prevalent right now that these practices are moving from a foodie trend to a fundamental shift in our food system. One of the people to thank for that momentum is Masanobu Fukuoka, whose *The One-Straw Revolution* became a must-read for organic farmers and their supporters around the world. Before his death in 2008, Fukuoka spent decades working on natural farming techniques that he felt could benefit the world. He didn't plow his field, use fertilizer, or flood his rice fields, in keeping with the methods traditional to many indigenous cultures. Commonly referred to as 'Do-Nothing Farming,' his techniques are part of a wider philosophy about respecting nature's own principles and rhythms. The success of his work sent Fukuoka from his small village in Japan to speaking engagements across the world, where he spent a great deal of time addressing issues of limited resources in areas like Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. In this, his last major book, Fukuoka draws from those experiences to create, once again, a timeless work that has the ability to create a revolution in agriculture. Beyond Fukuoka's important philosophy, his book is a lyrical, lovely valentine to nature. He's passionate about bringing other people to the near-enlightenment state in which he lived, where every single leaf moved him to appreciation. Expertly argued and backed by experience, anecdotes, and simple logic, Fukuoka's last work shines just as brightly as his first.

Publishers Weekly-

Renowned Japanese agriculturist and philosopher Fukuoka's (*The One-Straw Revolution*) final work calls on modern-day farmers to reconsider their methods and heed the needs of the land. Navigating work with international organizations—particularly in Africa, South Asia, and the United States—he illuminates regional disparities in environmental and agricultural thought and practice. Through trial-and-error and years of acute observation, Fukuoka developed a pioneering vision to 'avoid unnecessary work, especially work that was created as an adverse side effect of previous actions.' He describes these misguided experiments and failures, such as leaving an orchard completely on its own, as 'not natural farming; it was abandonment.' In clarifying popular misconceptions about organic and natural farming, he advises that we must not focus on cash crops, because 'there is no good or bad among life-forms on earth.' Only by the co-existence of myriad micro-organisms and vegetation will we be able to preserve and maintain our land. More important, the best farming was simple, 'rather than the modern approach of applying increasingly complex techniques to remake nature entirely for the benefit of human beings.' Though elimination of mechanization might be tough for modern agriculturalists to swallow, Fukuoka's last message provides a spiritually and environmentally enriching alternative to the farming conditions we know today.

"Masanobu Fukuoka ran a course on natural farming, and gave our Howard lecture at Navdanya's biodiversity farm in the Doon valley of India, and we even have a cottage named the Fukuoka hut. He was a teacher ahead of his time. 'Sowing seeds in the desert' is what all of humanity has to learn to do, whether it is in economic desert created by Wall Street, or an ecological desert created by globalized corporate agriculture."--**Vandana Shiva, founder of Navdanya Research Foundation for Science Technology & Ecology**

"Distilling what he has gathered from a lifetime of learning from nature, Masanobu Fukuoka offers us his gentle philosophy and a wealth of practical ideas for using natural farming to restore a damaged planet. *Sowing Seeds in the Desert* will persuade any reader that the imperiled living world is our greatest teacher, and inspire them to care for it as vigorously as Fukuoka has."--**Toby Hemenway, author of *Gaia's Garden***

"This book is a bombshell. Forget the gentle and retiring farmer of *The One-Straw Revolution* fame, replaced now by a flaming, world-travelling revolutionary. To achieve the kind of natural farming that can avoid worldwide collapse, Masanobu Fukuoka bluntly and fearlessly insists that we must first reject traditional ideas about God, the after life, accepted economic systems--especially capitalism--much of current agricultural thinking including organic farming, and even parts of science which he says are based on mistaken notions about the connection between cause and effect. Once we return to a way of life dictated by nature, not institutional religions, he says, we can apply his unorthodox farming methods to make the deserts bloom and the green fields stay lush without much expense or even labor involved. Be prepared to be mystified, irritated, shocked, and maybe even, if you persevere to the end, enlightened and encouraged by this trail-blazing book. Disagree with Fukuoka's provocative pronouncements at your own risk. Some of what he predicted in this book, originally written in Japanese in the 1990s has already happened, especially the collapse of the Japanese economy in recent years and the spread of deserts throughout the world."--**Gene Logsdon, author of *A Sanctuary of Trees***

"From our first meeting with Masanobu Fukuoka Sensei in the late 1970's at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, he has served as a primary guide, teacher, and inspiration in the engaged practice of organic farming and Zen meditation. Now with *Sowing Seeds in the Desert*, Fukuoka Sensei's teaching of Natural Farming continues to grow, sending deep roots down into the terrain of global restoration and food security for a hungry world. This wonderful book is to be celebrated and savored for its grounded, encouraging wisdom."--**Wendy Johnson, author of *Gardening at the Dragon's Gate***

"Fans of Fukuoka's *The One-Straw Revolution* will be delighted by *Sowing Seeds in the Desert*, his last book. It is a rich treasure trove detailing how his own philosophy of farming evolved and how he decided to apply what he learned on his own farm in Japan to other parts of the world. His insights into the tragedies of taking Western, industrial agriculture to places like Africa to 'enrich the national economy,' and his alternative approach of working with indigenous farmers to enable them to become self-sufficient, is instructive for all of us."--**Frederick Kirschenmann, Author of *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays From a Farmer Philosopher***

"This book is not a breath of fresh air, it's a howling gale from the East. It challenges us to think outside our

normal, rational frames and venture into a whole new way of relating to spirituality, the earth, and the growing of food. As I read, I was tempted to pick holes in Fukuoka's prescriptions for greening the world's deserts, but I kept coming back to the inescapable fact that he farmed his own land according to these principles over many years and produced a *lot* of food."--**Patrick Whitefield, author of *The Earth Care Manual***

About the Author

Masanobu Fukuoka (1913-2008) was a farmer and philosopher who was born and raised on the Japanese island of Shikoku. He studied plant pathology and spent several years working as a customs inspector in Yokohama. While working there, at the age of 25, he had an inspiration that changed his life. He decided to quit his job, return to his home village, and put his ideas into practice by applying them to agriculture.

Over the next sixty-five years he worked to develop a system of natural farming that demonstrated the insight he was given as a young man, believing that it could be of great benefit to the world. He did not plow his fields, used no agricultural chemicals or prepared fertilizers, and did not flood his rice fields as farmers have done in Asia for centuries, and yet his yields equaled or surpassed the most productive farms in Japan.

In 1975 he wrote *The One-Straw Revolution*, a best-selling book that described his life's journey, his philosophy, and farming techniques. This book has been translated into more than twenty-five languages and has helped make Mr. Fukuoka a leader in the worldwide sustainable agriculture movement. He continued farming until shortly before his death in 2008, at the age of ninety-five.

After *The One-Straw Revolution* was published in English, Mr. Fukuoka traveled to Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States. His interest turned to rehabilitating the deserts of the world using his natural farming techniques. Mr. Fukuoka is also the author of *The Natural Way of Farming* and *The Road Back to Nature*. In 1988 he received the Magsaysay Award, often referred to as the "Nobel of Asia," for Public Service.

Larry Korn is an American who lived and worked on the farm of Masanobu Fukuoka for more than two years in the early 1970s. He is translator and editor of the English-language edition of Mr. Fukuoka's *The One-Straw Revolution* and editor of his later book, *Sowing Seeds in the Desert*. Korn accompanied Mr. Fukuoka on his visits to the United States in 1979 and 1986. He studied Asian history, soil science, and plant nutrition at the University of California, Berkeley, and has worked in wholesale and retail plant nurseries, as a soil scientist for the California Department of Forestry, and as a residential landscape contractor in the San Francisco Bay Area. Korn has taught many courses and workshops about natural farming, permaculture, and local food production throughout the United States. He currently lives in Ashland, Oregon.

Users Review

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Jacob Keys:

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