

Making mention of living and working in rural Alabama does not often illicit oos and ahhs from any crowd, but especially when presenting this concept to a group of upwardly mobile millennials, the response is often hushed...initially. Depending on how far the conversation that follows continues, to find that people are willingly choosing to do this, on purpose, when presented with a myriad of options can be baffling to some. It is no accident that there are some young people around this fine nation returning to or creating new rural roots. These are the enterprising individuals we hope to gather.

The context in which a population of young people are living in a rural setting is often complex. Some subsisting in circumstance, while others consciously selecting this space as their medium for growth; our needs and desires are the same. Access to education, culture, community and healthy lifestyle for ourselves and our families are among the highest priorities. How is it that we can create this environment while so many of our talented minds are fleeing to places where these things already exist? We can do what communities have always done and come together to rethink and reimagine the way the place we live COULD be.

Across the nation, the struggle is real and felt. There are so many of us operating independently in a climate that is resistant to change. Those of us trying to shake things up tend to be outliers. Momentum can be slow, progress dulled or halted by politics and agenda. Now, more than ever, it is critically important that we gather these outliers from near and far into an environment where we can share our ideas, successes, failures, passions and motivations. The formation of this critical mass was shown by our first symposium to be an effective and powerful tool for us to form an identity, define our character and ethics. Now it is time to take our next steps.

Action, not reaction. Choice, not circumstance. Regenerative, not sustainable. A challenge, not a crisis. As we rethink the framing of our rural situation together we create pathways and actions to affect change amongst ourselves that will ripple into our communities; we broaden our networks and create a web of support for each other. Perhaps, most importantly, we will do as Wendell Berry instructed in *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*: “be joyful though you have considered all the facts” and “practice resurrection”.

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