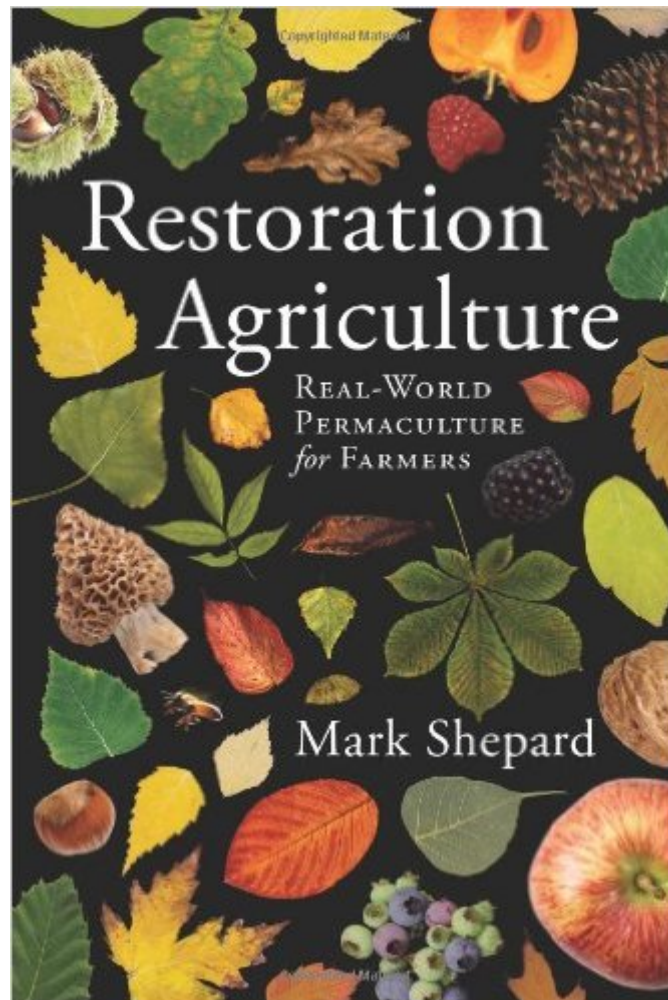


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# Restoration Agriculture



## Synopsis

Around the globe most people get their calories from annual agriculture - plants that grow fast for one season, produce lots of seeds, then die. Every single human society that has relied on annual crops for staple foods has collapsed. Restoration Agriculture explains how we can have all of the benefits of natural, perennial ecosystems and create agricultural systems that imitate nature in form and function while still providing for our food, building, fuel and many other needs - in your own backyard, farm or ranch. This book, based on real-world practices, presents an alternative to the agriculture system of eradication and offers exciting hope for our future.

## Book Information

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: Acres U.S.A.; 1 edition (January 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1601730357

ISBN-13: 978-1601730350

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (83 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #92,869 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #12 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > Trees](#) #30 in [Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Forestry](#) #61 in [Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Sustainable Agriculture](#)

## Customer Reviews

This work attempts to be an introduction to sustainable farming. The author's assertion (well supported by the evidence he cites) is that our current agricultural model is failing, and that we need to move away from a system built on annual plants, and towards a system built on perennial growth. This is permanent agriculture, or "permaculture". His model for this is an idealized, carefully structured combination of plants, or "polyculture" for food, fuel, and animal forage. In his words: "[w]hat we are doing is designing an agricultural system that closely mimics the savanna in its structure, the species mix, and in ecological function." This model has been outlined in pieces in other books. Much of his ideas about livestock forage are similar to what Joel Salatin writes, though Shepard is less strident, and more open to the idea of a vegetarian diet. He spends a great deal of time demonstrating with chart and figures how, exactly, a more perennial agricultural model can

generate more nutritious calories per acre than the current single crop. But the graphs do not overwhelm. I was pleased by the concrete examples in the book. Shepard demonstrates, in color pictures and with facts and figures, the viability of a farm based on permaculture principles. He gives tree spacings, plant yields, and grazing techniques. He explains the proper ratio of cows to sheep, for instance. However I was expecting a lot more details regarding plant choices, harvesting techniques, etc. What can be said for Shepard is that he stays on point better than, and is more accessible than, Bill Mollison, who has a tendency to wax philosophical.

I have read several permaculture books (Holmgren, Holzer, Hemenway, Jacke, Bane, etc.), and Mark Shepard's 'Restoration Agriculture' is worthy of its subtitle 'Real-World Permaculture for Farmers'. He has combined his hard-nosed practicality from his engineering background with a hefty dose of permacultural idealism to successfully realize his dream of 'New Forest Farm'. Shepard has been doing broad-scale permaculture/agroforestry since the mid 1990's, and has turned an old eroding cornfield into a productive property with fruit trees, nut trees, fruit shrubs, berries, vines, mushrooms, animals, bees, and annual (squash) and perennial (asparagus) vegetables as cash crops to help pay bills until the perennials start bearing more heavily. Of special interest to me were chapters 11 and 12, in which he deals with questions about the capacity of a perennial agriculture to provide enough calories to feed people. Can 'permaculture' really feed people or must we subsidize the permaculture fantasy with destructive annual tillage and a diet based on annual crops? Shepard admits his figures are a bit rough (yields for polycultures will change as trees mature), but corn produces about 13 million calories per acre annually, and Mr. Shepard suggests that a perennial system with perhaps a few annuals alley-cropped, can produce 6 million calories per acre. He says nutritionally there is simply no comparison between a monocrop of corn and the variety of a perennial system - the nutrition of the perennial system is vastly superior to a corn-based diet.

Good book but is basically a rehash of the 1929 classic *Tree Crops* by J. Russell Smith which is publicly available from a dozen sources. Actually in many ways Smith's book is better because he actually conducted research and correspond widely with others and didn't just showcase his own farm, which is what Shepard basically does. Shepard is also heavy on the personal opinion and light on the practical advice. It is not a bad book, but I would get it from a library if you can, or just read *Tree Crops*. I sure regret dropping \$25 on it! It sure doesn't contain much in the way of instruction. More than a few times he says to go read other peoples books to figure it out. It comes off as lazy to

me. After reading this book a second time I will add that I commend some of the ideas in the book, however, I must denounce some flaws. To begin with, perennial crops are not more reliable than annual. I have perennial and annual crops. It's almost an every other year that a late frost, for a season, makes either apples, pears, or peaches a TOTAL loss where I live by killing the blossoms. It's rare, where I live, to find a wild nut bearing tree where fewer than half the nuts are wormy or ruined for anything but pig feed. And, as someone who has sat down and shelled a big bowl of hickory nuts, I can tell you it is tedious and you don't end up with a whole lot of food after about 8 hours. In fact, that quantity of nut meat bits (and they will be little bits) can be consumed by some greedy children in mere minutes. A harvester built in 1980 can make ready as many calories in a millisecond. Part of what makes modern agriculture possible are the machines that work very well at harvesting.

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