

Along with the worry about the health and welfare of all of us in the world during this pandemic, and along with the appreciation for the efforts of medical scientists, our Governor Whitmer, all of the health professionals, first-responders, fire fighters, police officers, and journalists in mainstream media who are contributing in some way to our response and to the struggle to protect people, I have to admit I have done a little “wondering,” too.

The things I wonder about are mostly concerned with people who have the chance to do some concrete things for their own wellbeing but who don't seem to have much interest in those kinds of activities. First and foremost, I have to ask myself a simple question: “Why is it that so few people in our rural area have vegetable gardens?” There has been an upsurge in gardening since our local Amish community has come on the scene, perhaps because many of their gardens are highly visible, some in the front yards of residences.

Some of the lawn and grass mowing devotees see this as an insult to the manicured, smooth, fertilizer-and-irrigation-enhanced expanses of green on which they can expend fossil fuel. But, what could be more beautiful than a well-kept, productive vegetable garden—crops usually interspersed with rows or clumps of colorful flowers? And the final product of this work can appear on the family's table all winter long.

I have read that there is a large increase in vegetable seed sales this spring, apparently due to the coronavirus and its impact on the food supply. Is this what it takes to make people aware of the danger in having no extra food stored for the hard times? I know there are many people who, due to health, where they live, or for other reasons, simply cannot have a vegetable garden. The folks I am thinking about, though, are here in our own area. Traveling through a neighborhood not our own, I gaze at yards, thinking that there are perfect places for gardens by nearly all local residences. And yet, there are so few visible gardens.

Whether one grows some of a family's food or not, there are other concerns that perhaps have come to mind during this “stay at home” period in our area. I realize that many people—even if financially able to do so—have very little food on hand beyond the needs of a few days. And when they go to the store, the choices—both nutritionally and monetarily—aren't always in the best interest of people who should not be venturing out into markets unless absolutely necessary. I believe that, if at all possible, people should stockpile staple ingredients; dried beans, peas, rice, lentils, other grains, seasonings to make the most prosaic dishes more tasty, baking ingredients, and a few items for making homemade treats. Buying a supply of a favorite cookie isn't going to do the trick. In times of stress, stashes of goods like this just don't last long.

I remember a local grocer years ago who was chuckling that some people who worked at the area school had come in, thinking to bake, since school had been called off for the day. But, in his small store, he was out of cake mixes. Flour, sugar, cocoa, raisins and nuts—all in good supply. But, these ingredients didn't qualify for the customers that day.

Food security is more than just having money to buy whatever one wants to eat. It also involves, in the twenty-first century, the reliability of people in

other places far away growing our food. A secure transportation system is necessary to get the food to the stores. People need to have vehicles themselves, at least in rural areas like ours, to get to the places that sell the groceries. And, families have to be motivated to realize that food is the first priority.

There are many of us who, in times like this, avoid going to the store if at all possible, and instead, reach far back into the cupboards for that nearly forgotten bag of beans, knowing that a delicious soup will be the result of just a little work. And if we stockpile something in the future, hopefully, we will remember this day and buy or grow extra beans instead of—very oddly, I think—hoarding toilet paper.