

I have been speculating on some peculiar behaviors that appear to have been set into motion by the coronavirus pandemic. The first strange happening, of course, was the widespread hoarding of toilet paper. Whether that has eased up now or not, I don't know. We have not been into any retail establishment for several weeks.

But, from the internet and also carried effectively and efficiently by the neighborhood Scandinavian hotline, I know that garden seeds are hard to come by and that baby chicks are selling like hotcakes at the farm store that stock them this time of year.

Both of these phenomena—without fading away—will ebb with time. Many of those prospective gardeners, upon discovering the necessity of plot preparation for a vegetable garden and the work needed to actually produce their own food, will lose interest. And those egg-loving chick buyers may be surprised how long it is before those fluffy babies grow up and begin to lay eggs.

Still, some of them will persevere and develop a lifelong habit of growing some of their own food. And, it is these folks that have aroused my interest. Could it be that the coronavirus pandemic will lead to a new “back to the land” movement? And, if so, what will be the result?

The “green wave,” as it was called in Sweden, took place in the late 1970s. It was not just an American movement, but was significant in many areas of the world. It was predominately youth-driven and featured a number of variations—single people or couples “homesteading” on a small piece of land, communes, devotees of Thoreau taking to the woods, and a renewed interest in home industries such as bread baking. The “gurus” of this green wave were not young people, though. Probably the most influential pair, whose books became holy to many back-to-the-landers, were Helen and Scott Nearing. Their *Living the Good Life* became the new homesteaders' bible. And by the 1970s, Scott Nearing was already a white-haired old man—he died in 1983, just shy of his 100th birthday.

So, did most of these people who went “back to the land” stay there? Some did, but the vast majority went back, either step by step or in an “we've had enough of this” moment, to a more conventional lifestyle. This new/old way of living had proven to be very hard, and physical labor plus poverty do not create a state that many people willingly endure.

Why do we, then, embrace a lifestyle pretty much like the green wave advocated in the 1970s? Why did we not leave it for an easier, more financially attractive way of life as so many did? I suspect that part of the reason is that we did not “go back to the land” as most others did. Instead, we had never left.

So, I wonder if the new interest in the arts of country living will bring a back to the land movement again. If so, it is worthy to note that while the young folks of the 1970s were just a couple of generations removed from the agrarian past, with grandparents and even parents who knew what it had been like to live on little money, raising much of their own food, living without the material advantages of later years, this is almost half a century later, with another two generations between the youth of today and the traditions and

expertise of the past. Is another great social experiment on the way? It will be very interesting to see and will, perhaps, lead to much speculation about both the benefits and drawbacks of the way of life of the early 21st century.