

#plantist

How a New Human Behavior Can Spread Fast Enough to Save the Conditions for Human Life

SRC

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To all life on Earth.

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"The difficulty is to persuade the human race to acquiesce in its own survival. I cannot believe that this task is impossible."

— Bertrand Russell

The Atomic Bomb and the
Prevention of War (1946)

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Dr. Gerardo Ceballos (UNAM): *"This is no longer a warning about the future — it is a decision about whether you will still have one. #Plantist exists because this is the last window in which human action can still change the outcome."*

Hon. Melissa Parke (ICAN): *"Just as the world lives under the constant shadow of nuclear catastrophe, we now stand on the edge of a parallel existential crisis driven by the destruction of Earth's life-support systems. #Plantist offers a practical pathway to eliminate one of these existential risks by catalyzing a global societal shift toward plant-based eating at the speed this moment demands."*

Dr. Rodolfo Dirzo (Stanford University): *"#Plantist is an initiative that offers humanity exactly the kind of fast, inclusive response we need."*

Dr. Arvind Singhal (University of Texas): *"One of the most important grassroots responses of our era."*

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This is about survival. Not of the fittest, but of the most flexible.

The ability to shift is what survival requires. By the person you see when you look at yourself in the mirror. By the person billions see when they look at themselves in the mirror.

Your future is at stake. So is theirs. So is the future of everyone yet to be born. And if we fail, we lose more than the future. We lose the past. With no

one left to remember it, everything anyone ever loved, believed in and fought for is gone forever.

The remarkable thing is that the most consequential threat in the history of mankind can be solved in the second it takes to make a decision.

That is the story of this book. The story of how we survived.

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The problem began with an idea someone had a very long time ago.

The idea was to feed an animal the food people could eat, and then eat the animal.

The waste was the same then as it is now. Farmed animals synthesize protein and nutrients from plants, losing most of the energy needed for life in the process. Only the scale has changed. Today it is large enough to push all of humanity toward extinction.

Here is why. Feeding billions of people via animals requires land to feed the animals. That's an area roughly equivalent to all of Africa and India combined. Feeding billions of people directly would require only a fraction of that — an area one third the size of Africa.

The land that was cleared, and everything that lived there, were the systems producing the conditions life itself depends on.

Humans have been destroying what makes food possible in the first place.

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The obvious response is to explain this fatal inconsistency in the hope that this alone will solve it.

But that does not work, and the reason is unusually well established.

Ten separate reviews, covering more than four hundred studies and eighty thousand people, have measured the distance between intending and doing.

People are told why something matters. They agree. Their behavior does not change.

This is not dishonesty and it is not indifference. Believing something and acting on it depend on different mental processes. You can understand ecological risk completely and still eat exactly as you did before.

Most of what any of us does in a day is not reasoned out. It comes from habit, from what the people around us are visibly doing, from what feels normal.

Information changes what we know. It rarely changes what we do.

Food is the extreme case. It is prepared by parents and grandparents before anyone is old enough to examine the reasoning behind it. New information does not easily displace the understanding of the world people inherit.

Thirty years of nutrition science, environmental reporting and government dietary guidelines have shown this. The information is available. The behavior has not changed.

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The British government published an intelligence assessment concluding that global ecosystem degradation and collapse threaten national security and prosperity, and identifying food production as the most significant cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss.

The assessment described what follows: economic insecurity, migration, political instability, competition between states for what remains, conflict and war. Those arrive earlier than ecological collapse. The danger that compels immediate action is that a tipping point is felt only after it has been crossed, when recovery is no longer possible.

The obvious alternative is to require the change.

Ban it. Tax it. Ration it. Legislate it.

Sometimes this works. Seatbelt laws and indoor smoking bans are among the genuine public-health successes of the past fifty years.

Food is different. It is more private, more cultural, more connected to identity and tradition and livelihood than almost anything else a government might regulate. Where coercive dietary policy has been attempted, it produces what psychological reactance predicts: the more a

choice feels forced, the harder people defend their right to make it — sometimes regardless of what the choice actually is.

And there is a simpler obstacle. No government has the authority to do this across a global population. No institution has the capacity to enforce it. There is no body that can issue the instruction.

Agreement between governments does not solve it either. A shift of this size would require most states to adopt equivalent measures, coordinate their timing, and sustain them together, inside a window that is already narrowing. Coordination at that scale and speed has no precedent.

Whatever works here will work by changing what people choose, not by removing the choice.

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Here is where that leaves us.

A behavior that is enormous in aggregate and trivial in the particular. A population that already has the facts and is not moved by them. A habit too personal to legislate. No authority that could compel it if anyone wanted to.

Everyone would be better off if enough people changed together. But almost nobody has a strong individual reason to be first.

That is the problem in its pure form. The science is settled enough to act on and nothing needs inventing. What remains is coordination.

Billions of people. Different languages, religions, cuisines, incomes, governments, histories. And a behavioral shift that has to move through all of them — fast enough, voluntarily, without a central command.

Stated that way it sounds impossible.

However, humans have been solving similar challenges for as long as there have been humans.

Long before governments and markets organized most of human activity, people faced tasks too large for one household. A harvest to bring in. A channel to dig. A road washed out. A neighbor in trouble.

Every society built ways of turning those needs into collective action, and gave them names.

Finland has talkoot. Ireland has meitheal. Norway has dugnad. Across Eastern Europe, toloka and talaka. Indonesia has gotong royong, which became part of the country's founding political philosophy. The Philippines has bayanihan. Turkey has imece. In East Africa, harambee — "all pull together" — became Kenya's national motto. Sudanese communities use naffīr, where a group forms for a specific task and dissolves when it is done. Rwanda's umuganda became institutionalized as national community service. Across the Andes, minka, minga, ayni. In Brazil, mutirão.

A need becomes visible as shared. People see that their own contribution matters. They see others contributing. Labor and attention come together without anyone directing every action from a center.

The same thing appears under pressure. After an earthquake, a flood, a fire, people who have never met pull strangers out of rubble, clear roads, distribute food, take families into their homes. Groups form around needs that did not exist the day before.

The scale of the challenge is unprecedented. The underlying human capacity is not.

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That capacity depends on one condition. The need has to be visible, and so does everyone's part in meeting it. A flood destroys a road and everyone can see the road.

Eating is the opposite. Few people ever see what you eat. Across the world, hundreds of millions of people do not eat animals, and almost none of them can see each other. Many more understand what is at stake and have nowhere to act on it.

The people exist. The behavior exists. What is missing is visibility.

That is what the response is for.

Developed by the Survival Response Core (SRC), it is designed to stop the destruction before the damage becomes irreversible. It uses what is known about how a new way of living moves through a population until it becomes ordinary.

It reaches into a vast number of communities and fields at once. It does not guess in advance where change will start. It looks for the places where change meets the least resistance, and it concentrates there.

Where change takes hold, it is strengthened until it holds on its own. Where nothing happens, effort moves elsewhere. Where change appears unexpectedly, it matters precisely because nobody predicted it.

The goal does not change. The way of reaching it keeps learning.

Some people change before everyone else, and they can be found.

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In any population, about two and a half percent act on their own conclusions. They decide regardless of what anyone around them thinks, and that indifference to local opinion is exactly what lets them go first.

The next thirteen percent or so are different. They wait until something looks real enough, and established enough, to attach their name to. When they move, others notice.

Together that is roughly one in six. These are the people whose choices can become visible before anything is widespread.

The next third are not waiting for better arguments. They are waiting to see people like them already doing it. No explanation can stand in for that, which is why decades of explanation changed so little.

Information campaigns assume that people weigh the evidence and then change their minds.

The alternative is to change what people encounter.

So the response begins with the people already prepared to act, and makes what they do visible to everyone else.

Each one who is visible changes the surroundings a little for everyone nearby. For the next person, the choice is hardly a choice. It is the obvious thing, and the easiest.

The task is to arrange ordinary surroundings so that the new way of eating is simply what happens, whether or not anyone thinks about it.

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A conventional effort has a center. An organization, a spokesperson, a headquarters that sends out messages.

That does not work here. However much money it has, a center sends everything from the same place, and people notice. What moves people is hearing the same thing from several directions at once.

A center is also unnecessary. A practice can spread through many independent people, with nobody directing it, all arriving at the same thing without knowing about each other.

So the response is organized around nodes.

A node is an area of focus. Nothing more is built into the word.

In each one the work is the same. Find the people and institutions already doing something that points the same way — researchers, editors, teachers, clergy, people who buy food for institutions, growers, organizers, artists.

The best place to start is with people already succeeding at what their community is struggling with, using their own means. The answer is already there. The work is making it visible to the neighbors.

What the response adds is a connection: the same practice, in words that already belong to their world, joined to something global instead of a local effort that ends when they stop.

Each person who joins makes the next one easier, because the practice can now be seen from inside. Each institution that moves makes the next one possible, because the first has already paid the price of going early.

A node in Mongolia and a node in Japan will look nothing alike. The response is the same. The form is not, and should not be.

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This is how it is done.

Everything moves through areas of focus called nodes. There are about thirty, and the list is open. They don't need to be built. Each is already full of people.

Scientists. Journalists. Artists. Teachers. Cooks. Religious leaders. Companies. Governments.

The SRC gives each node its first direction. Then its real work begins: connecting what happens in one node to what happens in another. The people do their own work.

The nodes activate everywhere at the same time, for a reason. A behavior that appears in one place can be dismissed as a local choice. When the same behavior appears across professions, religions, cultures and countries at once, it becomes something else. It becomes part of the world in which people make their choices.

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Intelligence services do not usually concern themselves with dinner. Their work is to find threats to the state, judge how serious they are, and advise the people who must act.

Ecosystem collapse is now a threat of that kind. One national assessment has already concluded, with high confidence, that it endangers security and prosperity, and that food production is the most significant cause of biodiversity loss on land.

The threat has no enemy. There is no border to defend, no army to deter, no government to negotiate with. Its cause is spread through ordinary life, repeated billions of times a day.

An analyst can describe it in detail. What an analyst cannot do is change what billions of people eat, and the government the analyst advises cannot order that change either.

So the intelligence node brings one piece of information into rooms where it has never been heard: a response exists, and it works at exactly the place where the threat begins.

The first question in such a room is always the same. Is it true?

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The question goes to the scientists.

Scientists are trained to distrust anything that arrives with an agenda, which makes them the right people to ask. A claim that has survived an ecologist trying to break it is worth more than any number of claims that never met one.

Some of them have been ready for years. They reached the same conclusions on their own: that species are disappearing far faster than they have for millions of years, and that the land taken to feed farmed animals is a leading reason. They published their warnings in journals few people outside their fields read, and had no structure through which to do anything more.

When the question reaches them, they already know the answer. Some of the leading researchers on extinction already support the response.

One of them has done work the intelligence assessment itself cites. The analysts reached their conclusion partly on his research.

That is what the scientists are for. Their standing depends on being right, and when they support something openly, it becomes hard to dismiss. They correct as well as confirm, and a response that changes when they show it is wrong becomes more credible each time.

What they confirm does not stay in the journals for long.

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A journalist reads it.

The journalist's value is independence. A journalist has no part in the response, only the stake everyone shares. Readers trust a reporter outside the effort more than any message from the people inside it. An idea examined in public, by someone with no part in it, enters a society differently from one that has only been announced.

A journalist in Pakistan read the intelligence assessment and wrote about how plantism answers the threat it describes.

Security. That is where this began.

Somewhere, an analyst reads such an article on the way to work, and finds in a newspaper what their own assessment could only say in a closed room.

Outside the building, the symbol is painted on a wall, two meters high. The analyst has walked past it for a week without knowing what it was.

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The painting on that wall may belong to the artist. The symbol in it belongs to no one.

The response has two signs, and both were given to the public before anything else was done. One is a hashtag, #plantist, that anyone can place beside their name or under a photograph of a meal, so that something private becomes visible, and can be counted and found. The other is a symbol that can be painted, printed, stitched or drawn by hand, and that needs no language to be understood.

A symbol that exists only as a picture belongs, in practice, to whoever can reproduce the picture. So work is underway to make it a standard character, typed and displayed the same way on every phone and computer in use. Once that is done, no company, platform or organization will ever be able to take it back.

An artist who paints it on a wall needs no permission. Neither does a clothing company that puts it on a shirt, or the person who wears the shirt to work. The artist places it in shared space, where people meet it without looking for it. The shirt carries it through that space, into rooms the artist will never see.

This is a dugnad. A dugnad of billions.

The need is shared, the work is voluntary, and the practice belongs to everyone who takes part. A dugnad has organizers, and it is never their dugnad. It continues in the next village, the next generation, with the next organizer, because the people taking part keep it alive.

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The person in the shirt arrives at work.

One person who has changed is easy to dismiss. The others decide that person is unusual, and nothing follows.

A second person in the same office changes, and then a third. Now it is harder to explain away. These are people who see each other every day, and when several of them are visibly doing the same thing, it stops looking like a personal choice. The first few are no longer alone, so they continue.

The response looks for these people deliberately. In every workplace, profession and group of friends, some people's example matters more than others'. Often these are the ones others recognize as being in the same situation, rather than the most prominent. A teacher listens to another teacher. A farmer listens to a farmer who has faced the same drought. People are moved far more by those who understand their circumstances than by those they admire.

Some of these groups have been waiting. Large numbers of people already understand how serious ecological collapse has become, and have carried that knowledge privately, with nowhere to act on it. For them, the response arrives as a place to go.

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Most people belong to more than one group.

A software engineer in Bangalore prays at the same temple every morning. A taxi driver in Nairobi coaches the children's football team on his street. A teenager in Jakarta has friends in twenty countries she has never visited. When one person carries something from one group into another, it arrives as news. When several carry it, it arrives as a way of life.

Leaders will emerge in every community. Within their own group, a leader's example reaches further than anyone's from outside, so each carries the practice into their own community. No one leads the global plantist response.

Many groups gather around a faith. There, the person most trusted on questions of right and wrong is a religious leader, and no scientist will replace that trust. Every major tradition already speaks of stewardship, of compassion, of responsibility toward life. The practice can arrive in words the tradition already holds, from someone the community already trusts. The same is true in a mosque, a temple, a synagogue, a gurdwara.

Here a danger appears. If the practice comes to look like a religious practice, the analyst will not touch it. If it looks like a cause for scientists, the farmer will not. Whatever group it seems to belong to, every other group has a reason to refuse it. Strangers clear a road together because the road belongs to no one.

So almost nothing stays the same everywhere. Two things only: the practice, and the reason for it. Everything else is free — the language, the arguments, the traditions invoked, and who chooses them. A version for farmers will not look like one for security analysts, or for a congregation.

The framework already exists in dozens of languages, and in most of them it needs words that did not exist before. Plantist is one. A thing that has no name is hard to see. Once it has one, people can point to it, count it, and recognize it in each other.

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The teenager in Jakarta eats lunch at school, and the school has a kitchen.

Thousands of people eat there every day, and none of them chose the menu. The same is true of universities, ministries, airlines and the canteens of large companies. One decision at the top changes what is normal for everyone below it, all at once. And because an institution buys the food, consumption changes the same day, whether anyone has been persuaded or not.

Institutions are where the response meets the greatest scale with the least persuasion. A school changes what children eat before they are old enough to have an opinion about it. A platform used by billions changes what they see every day. An international body changes what is discussed in the rooms where governments meet.

The people who supply that kitchen notice.

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A market has no opinions. It has stock, contracts, shelf space and factories, all arranged around a guess about what people will buy. Change what people buy and all of it has to change.

This part needs nobody's convictions. A supermarket buyer moving shelf space endorses nothing. A manufacturer changing a production line has not changed their mind about anything. They are following demand, the only signal they are built to read.

Businesses are slow to change and slower to change back. Contracts run for years. Factories are money already spent. Once the new arrangement is built, it is expensive to undo. Nobody plans that.

And a food system rebuilt around new demand makes the change visible everywhere. What is in the shops. What restaurants put at the center of the menu. What can be bought at a service station at midnight. What needs no explanation when a guest comes for dinner.

Some companies move before demand does. They see where it is going and build it into their products and their brands early. Others follow later. Either way, the market becomes a node without being asked.

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In some places the response cannot wait for the rest of the world.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, roughly 26 million people do not have enough to eat. The country has about 80 million hectares of farmland,

the second-largest tropical rainforest in the world, and some of the best growing conditions on the continent. Three in four people live from farming. The land could feed far more people than it does.

There, the point of no return is close. Forest is being cleared now. Water is failing now. Conflict over land is happening now. Elsewhere, plantism protects the future. Here, it also protects the present.

Much Congolese food is already plant-based. Cassava, plantains, beans, groundnuts and leafy greens are staples in many homes. So the practice already exists there. What has to be built is farming that produces more and pays better, so that as incomes rise, large livestock systems are never built at all. Never building such a system is far cheaper than taking one apart.

The response concentrates there on results a neighbor can see: land that yields more, income that rises, a harvest that survives a flood.

When it works, the result is visible far beyond the Congo. A journalist can stand in the field. A scientist can measure it. An analyst can watch a region move away from collapse. One change in what people grow and eat, answering a problem that seemed far too large for anything that simple. Once it has been seen, it looks obvious. The simplest answers to enormous problems usually do.

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For a long time, most of this happens quietly.

A famous person changing means little when nobody else has. The same person changing when many already have tells everyone still undecided which way things have gone. Fame does its work late.

Its strongest form is a single shared moment. One broadcast, watched across the world on the same night, with performers who already live this way. Everyone watching knows that everyone else is watching too. A practice that has been spreading quietly becomes something the world sees itself doing, together, in public.

Afterward, millions of people ask the same question at the same time: what is this? Short explanations answer it within seconds. Films and television carry it to people who never read the news. Clips travel from phone to phone faster than any institution could send them. And some people want the whole argument, in order, from the beginning. That is what a book is for.

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The most dangerous moment is when everything seems to be working.

A text translated into enough languages to reach most people on Earth. A symbol on walls in cities nobody planned for. A broadcast watched by hundreds of millions. All of it can happen while what people eat has not changed at all. Visibility shows reach. Only a change in behavior shows adoption.

So the response watches for other signs. The practice needs less and less outside help. It appears where nobody planted it. And the language changes: people stop saying what should be done and start describing what

they and everyone around them already do. No single sign can be trusted alone. What counts is several appearing together, each with a different innocent explanation, in a way no single explanation covers.

Those tests are set now, before the results come in, so that no one can later redefine success to fit whatever happened.

What all of this rests on was found under controlled conditions. Doing it across a whole species has never been done. So the response knows what it knows and what it does not, and it changes as evidence arrives. The intelligence assessment arrived after the response was already running, and changed it. Nothing here is final except the goal.

Resources follow the same evidence. Philanthropists can move quickly where institutions cannot. Institutions move more slowly and bring the scrutiny of people whose job is to judge exactly this kind of work. Both look for the same thing: change that holds.

The work reduces itself. At first almost everything needs attention. As change sustains itself in more places, there is less and less to adjust. The response is designed to become unnecessary.

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Governments arrive late to most changes. That is worth knowing.

Adult smoking in the United States was at its height in the mid-1960s, when the government first reported its link to disease. Bans on smoking indoors came decades later, once smoking had already lost its place in social life —

through evidence, through organizations of non-smokers, through worry about other people's smoke, and through smokers increasingly going outside, apart, apologetic. Social change made the law possible.

Then the law carried the change further. In Scotland, researchers asked bar workers about the 2006 ban before and after it took effect. Before, 69 percent supported it, and nearly half expected it to hurt business. After, support rose to 79 percent, and fewer than one in five still worried.

Farm subsidies, trade rules, school meals, dietary guidelines and land policy are all built around what people eat now. While that holds, they are almost impossible to change. As what people eat changes, they become impossible to defend — subsidies paying for food nobody wants, guidelines describing meals nobody eats. The government action people are waiting for becomes possible through the change they are waiting to make.

The response also works with smaller countries able to go first. A national transition, carried out by a real government, gives larger governments something no model can: a precedent they can examine. Large countries usually follow steps someone else has already taken.

And because the SRC is based in Geneva, among the institutions where governments meet, the response stays within reach of the rooms where these decisions are prepared, year after year.

For the analyst, this returns to where it began. A change in what people eat, spreading on its own, reduces the pressure their assessment measured. It reaches the cause where it starts.

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A government can change what is legal. It cannot change what a child grows up believing is normal. That happens at home, and it is where the change becomes permanent.

A way of living becomes a fact of life by a process that is well understood.

One generation does something again and again, for reasons it still remembers. The next finds the practice already there, without the reasons. A choice becomes a custom. A custom becomes simply how things are. By the third generation, the original decision has vanished into ordinary life.

This is how eating animals became invisible. For most people it began before they were old enough to choose, and they have never had reason to question it, any more than they question which side of the road to drive on.

The same process works in the other direction.

A child raised where plant food is simply what the family eats does not inherit an argument. The child inherits meals. Nothing has to be decided. No position has to be defended at the table. There is no cost to being the only one doing something different. There is no memory of a time before, and no sense that anything was ever otherwise.

By the time that child is grown, the change that took all this effort will need nothing at all to maintain. It will just be how the family eats, then how their children eat, until nobody remembers that it ever had to be built.

That is when the work is finished. When nobody has to agree.

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Most of the world's farmland grows food for animals. When people stop eating animals, land the size of continents is no longer needed for what it does now.

The obvious next thought is to plant trees on it. That thought is wrong often enough to matter.

Much of the world's ancient grassland lies in climates warm and wet enough to support forest, which is exactly why it gets mistaken for damaged forest waiting to be restored. It is old, and most of its age is underground — in roots and buried stems and communities of plants found nowhere else. Original grassland is far richer in species, especially flowering herbs, than grassland regrowing after plantations. Plant trees there and what lived there may take centuries to return, if it returns at all.

Some former pasture will become forest again. Some, as research in the highlands of Brazil's Atlantic Forest shows, turns into scrub that burns easily, neither the forest that came before nor the grassland it resembles.

Ending the consumption of animals creates the possibility of restoring nature. What is restored, where, and by whom is a separate decision, made locally, and done badly it could destroy as much life as the pasture did.

Some of the ecosystems and habitats already damaged will continue to deteriorate for years, even after the destruction stops. The response prevents further damage, giving what remains a chance to recover.

Farms without animals still have to feed their soil. Veganic farming does it with plants. Clover and other legumes take nitrogen from the air, and compost returns other nutrients to the ground.

Communities built around livestock face real disruption, and it should be said plainly. Raising livestock wears out the soil, water and forest that raising livestock depends on, so a region that continues is using up what its own economy will need. Moving to plant farming on the same land is hard, and for many it will hurt. It is still the direction in which their own future lies. How that move is managed belongs to governments, which have the means.

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Something else would be true afterward, and it has nothing to do with food.

The gloomy view of human beings is very old, and well supported. Economists showed why people do not contribute to things everyone benefits from. An ecologist showed how sensible choices by individuals destroy what everyone depends on. The evidence is the long history of shared resources used up.

A species that changed a daily habit in every culture on Earth, on purpose, without force, to protect something none of them would ever own, would be evidence of something the gloomy view leaves out.

That coordination on this scale is open to us. The capacity has always been there. What has been missing is a need visible enough to bring it together.

Whatever else this century asks of us, that would be worth knowing about ourselves.

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One more thing, and it is the reason any of this matters.

Everything anyone has ever made was made for someone with a future.

Every building, every song, every discovery, every letter written to someone who would read it later. Every person who endured something hard and believed it would come to mean something. Every parent who told a child what the world would be like when they grew up.

All of it assumed there would be a later. None of it said so, because nobody thought to.

A memory needs someone to hold it. A discovery needs someone to use it. A sacrifice needs someone it was for. Take away the people who come after, and the past no longer arrives anywhere.

This is hard to hold in mind for more than a moment. The end of the future takes what was coming, and then it reaches back and empties what already happened of what made it matter.

So the opposite is also true, and it is the more useful half.

Keeping the future keeps everything that ever happened. Every life already lived. Every person who suffered through something believing it counted. All of it stays true, for as long as someone is left for it to be true for.

The land gives the future back. The way we eat gives the land back.

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We already know how important behaviors spread. It has been studied for eighty years. That knowledge can be put together on purpose and pointed at the one behavior that has to change.

Evidence shows what to do next: where change is taking hold, where crossings work or fail, where meaning shifts, and where the response has to adjust.

The rest is a decision each of us makes, several times a day, for the rest of our lives.

It begins with the person in the mirror. Then another person, a community, the public.

The destination is not optional.

Everybody is a natural plantist. Few among us have an instinct to self-destruct.

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