

## **STEPHEN GASKIN'S FARM**

*by Farm members, from a full-page advertisement in the local Tennessee newspaper*

### Monday Night Class

Stephen Gaskin gets people high by telling the truth. Through the question and answer dialogues of Monday Night Class, he illustrates how the universe works. He teaches that enlightenment is much like sanity and being a grownup, that you make changes in the world by making changes in yourself. Often the message of his teaching is simply to "straighten up." This is the "sudden school," which holds that everyone really knows where it's at all the time.

Monday Night Class builds bridges between people of all generations and religions and frames of mind. It's part of ongoing conversations about God, energy, organic psychedelics as an aid on the path, the function of a redeemer, marriage and the family, tantric yoga, the nature of the subconscious, telepathy, Zen, chanting AUM, and how to get it on.

### The Farm

It's been over six months now since our arrival in southern middle Tennessee and it feels to us like it's time to introduce ourselves more completely. We like it here a lot and we're thankful to be so warmly received. We also realize that we're a large and rather unusual group and that there are many questions that we could answer. In order to answer some of those questions we have taken this page to inform you of our intentions and progress and to describe by Farm members the nature of our community.

Four hundred of us, including our children, live on The Farm.

One Sunday morning in San Francisco last February Stephen said, "Let's go to Tennessee," and we all thought it was a good idea. For five years before that Stephen had been teaching a weekly class to hold communion, and becoming a Church. Most of us had originally come to San Francisco from all parts of the country. Stephen's Monday Night Class and Sunday Morning Service were at the center of that spiritual awakening. A community evolved over the years, until we left San Francisco in a caravan of remodeled schoolbuses and trucks to follow Stephen on a tour of speaking engagements at colleges and churches around the country. After twelve thousand miles and four months on the road, we returned to California, only to decide after a week that all of us who had been living and traveling together wanted to go on living together on a farm, and Tennessee had been a place where we had felt welcomed by the people and the land.

Everyone who lives on The Farm follows Stephen as his personal spiritual teacher and values his counsel on how to change. Stephen believes that all men are capable of change, and he teaches them how to improve their lives by being peaceful and honest. Living with him requires a willingness to have not just your

outward actions but your innermost thoughts illuminated by the clear light of spiritual purity. It works out that The Farm is a non-denominational family monastery with Stephen as the head of the household.

There are 82 married couples living in the community. Our church is recognized by the State of Tennessee and Stephen performs the sacrament of holy matrimony. He has married 46 couples since June, with marriage licenses and certificates issued by Lewis County. “You can look in books on how to carpenter or old-fashioned books about how to weld by hand, and you can find a usage of the word marry, and it means to take two things and put them together so that they be one thing. It means union. Union is one.” (Stephen—Sunday Morning Service, 6 June 1971.) Our marriages are lifetime commitments, and married couples are faithful to each other and raise their children together.

Good health is important to us at The Farm. From among our members we have evolved a medical staff that administers first aid and dispenses medical supplies. If a member of The Farm becomes ill or is injured he can go to the medical staff for immediate diagnosis and treatment. If necessary the patient is sent to town to see a doctor. We like to be self-sufficient but we also appreciate the cooperation of the County and State Health Department. Our nurse gives all of our children their childhood inoculations.

Farming: Although we’d been saying for a long time, “As you sow so shall you reap,” we found out when we got our piece of dirt that none of us had ever really farmed before.

Our aim is to grow as much of the food we consume as we can. In the time from our arrival to now we have brought under cultivation nearly 100 acres. We’ve purchased two old tractors, rebuilt one, got a hold of a bush and bog, a two-row planter, a transplanter and cultivator. We’re trying to build and improve our soil. Sorghum pumice is returned to the field in the form of sheet compost. Our late cane fields are covered with a winter legume.

We’re working out a technology as we go along. None of us ever tried to build a town before. It’s keeping us busy. If we decide we need something, the first thing we do is see if anybody might have one under their bed or somewhere. If not, we want to know if we can get it used or possibly make it. We’ve got a heavy-duty 1946 Diamond “T” that used to be a lumber truck. It cost a dollar. We’ve used it to haul from as far away as New Orleans. We cut a bus off to just below the windows and made a giant pickup truck out of it. Then there’s the jeep, a big four-wheel drive International, that was used by a Hollywood studio in army movies. That’s some of our motor pool.

When we first got into farming we thought we might like to try to do it all with horses and hoes. We soon found out that for a community of our size that would mean about a horse per family to do the job. So right now we’ve got two Belgian mares and two tractors and we’re buying another tractor. We have electricity in the

schoolhouse and office, and other places of work with kerosene lamps, and cook with propane. We still take our laundry to town but we're building a laundromat where we'll have electric wringer-type washers.

One of our seven houses is under construction. Foundations for eight more are started. The design we've chosen for houses is the Dutch Frame, with added dormers to make the designs more flexible for larger families. We're using local materials like stone and rough-cut oak and poplar. Some of our men are working at nearby sawmills in exchange for lumber. The rest of our lumber and hardware is purchased from local suppliers. The roof, wall and floor joists are pre-cut for each house by a crew using power tools and assembled at the site by a carpentry crew. The foundations consist of stone and unhewn logs or railroad ties set in concrete. Plywood and roll roofing form a structurally rigid weather seal, and a Nashville plastics firm gives us its rejects of styrofoam, which provides noble insulation. When we get caught up with our housing we'll build a church.

We have a spiritual agreement to keep peace with the animals, so we don't eat meat. "Somebody with a bachelor's in chemistry and a doctorate in biology is helping us work out our diet. We're complete vegetarians. No cattle, all we have is the horses to work. But we don't use any animal foods at all, even dairy products. Because we should be able to make it on our own life force. Like that cow can make it on alfalfa. We ought to be able to make it on vegetation too, not necessarily alfalfa either, a rich and a varied and a balanced diet." (Stephen—WGTV, Athens, Georgia, 15 November 1971.) A typical meal for us: black-eye peas and cornbread, collard greens, sweet potatoes, mint tea and sorghum cookies.

There are 75 kitchens on The Farm including our school cafeteria and the community kitchen, which feeds about 40 people three meals a day. Each of these kitchens gets all its food from our store. Much of our food is purchased in quantity from local wholesale grocers and farmers. Sometimes we send a truck out with some pickers. We worked for wheat in Kansas, picked apples in Michigan, pecans in Georgia, and peppers in Lewis County. We've also harvested several crops of vegetables from our own gardens. Some of our ladies have been canning and dehydrating fruits and vegetables for the winter store.

The rolling Southern countryside, tropically warm and damp in the summer, teems with life, and the Westerners and Northerners were taken a little by surprise. They had some trouble with an impure water supply in the springs and rivers that cross the farm, and several people fell sick before they learned to boil or chlorinate their drinking water. Then they were attacked by a swarm of chiggers. Staying stoned helped them to get along with the bugs, and also gives them a sixth sense about when a chigger is about to bite so it can be snatched away.

Having so much free land to live on has led the families into some heavy experiences with one another. Early in the spring they decided to end all the music being made on the farm because too many people were relating to it in old ego-

attached ways. But eventually it was worked out, and now there is a lot of singing and playing once again. “Amazing Grace” is the family favorite, and a lot of down-home country music is creeping into the singing circles.

The camp has at least 30 children, with more arriving every month. They are being raised almost completely free from things like TV, cars, money, police, and all the rest—coming back to the city seemed like a shock to our friends. One of the little trips they have is that when someone absorbs some bad karma—say by scalding herself—she lets out a shout which is picked up by someone within earshot and passed along from person to person until it disappears over a hill.

Now that the crops are in, the family is getting down for winter. They have one adobe and wood house up already. Now they are hurrying to finish some more plywood, foam-insulated A-frames for the people still living in tents before the cold weather and snow sets in. The family is using some of its magic to hold back the snows long enough for them all to get set up.

Steve Gaskin himself has been convicted and sentenced to a three-year sentence for pot after a huge police raid on The Farm’s three-acre marijuana patch. The family has been getting itself together to do without him for what may be an extended length of time. He has been speaking to them individually, helping each person as much as he can to be strong and wise for themselves. If the group can make it without him, it will be all the tribute he wants to the wisdom of his teachings. ■