

Back To The Future, Episode Two: To Market, To Market
November 18, 2009
A Series from Sea Change Radio

This episode of our Back To The Future series looks at the revival of a locally based food system in western Massachusetts. We talk with Margaret Christie of CISA (Community In Support of Agriculture), visit with organic farmer Jim Pitts at the Amherst Farmers Market, and speak with social historian Christopher Clark of the University of Connecticut about how the market economy evolved in the Connecticut Valley in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

On November 9, two whistleblowers from the International Energy Agency [dropped a bombshell](#). They said the world is much closer to running out of oil than official estimates admit. That means peak oil is here or coming very, very soon. It will affect everything, but our globalized food system will be among the hardest hit. Aside from using oil to make pesticides and fertilizers, it depends on oil for getting food to market. Building robust *local* food systems is necessary now, more than ever. That's something Community In Support of Agriculture, or CISA has been doing since the early 1990's.

Margaret Christie has been at CISA since 1995 and started its wildly popular Local Hero campaign. Now she is the organization's director of special projects.

[CISA's list of farmers markets](#)

[CISA's Local Hero Campaign](#)

[The New England Small Farm Institute](#)

[The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project at Tufts University](#)

We caught up with Jim Pitts of [Delta Organic Farm](#) at the Amherst Farmer's Market on a recent sunny Saturday afternoon. At his stall, he was selling pancakes made entirely of local ingredients: locally made pancake mix, maple syrup, yoghurt from [Sidehill Farm](#) in Ashfield, Massachusetts and compote he makes himself. (He's pretty proud of his pesto, too.) Pitts says, the Farmer's Market not only allows him to sell his wares at a higher margin, cutting out the middleman, but also gives him the chance to find out what customers like and want.

Back when our nation was still new, most people lived on the land. There's the iconic image of the American [yeoman farmer](#) -- a rugged individualist, eking out a living on the soil with his hardworking wife and kids. But how much of an individualist was he? Social historian [Christopher Clark](#) says those farmers were closely integrated into a rural community dependent on barter, social relationships, and local markets. Clark has written about the transition of the western Massachusetts economy from mostly subsistence to mostly market based in his book, *The Roots Of Rural Capitalism*. It looks at how rural New England changed in the eight decades between the Revolutionary and the Civil War.