Ecological Citizenship:

Taking into account the well-being and future (capabilities and functioning) of non-human inhabitants as well as how one’s actions impacts humans, environmental justice, environmental anti-racism, future generations of human, the ecology, plants and animal populations locally and globally. This requires thinking on many levels, across ecological living systems, as well as historical, cultural, and social contexts (deep map thinking).

In the book, *Epitaph for a peach: Four seasons on my family farm,* the author David Mas Masumato shares many examples of ecological citizenship as he writes about his journey and the way of life on a family farm in California.

Deep Map Thinking in the practice of ecological citizenship

Masumoto makes several references to his Japanese family’s lineage as farmers, “which dates back centuries.” (Page 19). Masumoto is a third-generation Japanese-American farmer and frequently refers to “farming the land his father and mother farmed, land where his grandparents have labored.” A common theme is how Masumoto finds a connection to his ancestors and his heritage through farming his family’s land and how he wants to honor his heritage and his new family, his wife Marcy and baby daughter, through his farming practices.

When Masumoto discusses his struggle to reconcile the old and the new in the farming industry where innovation and change are integral to survival, he reasons that old does not necessarily mean obsolete in defense of his Sun Crest peaches. Even though his Sun Crest peaches are viewed obsolete by food brokers, he is determined not to give up on them. It is evident that honoring his family and heritage is threaded in all his farming practices.

“they are part of a tradition on our farm, they hold meaning for my family. But the pressures for progress challenge that meaning. My peaches are like the traditions of the homeland – you don’t simply leave them behind, you carry them with you like historical baggage.”(Page 20).

Bringing Back the Old

David Masumoto isn’t all together opposed to change. He decides to resurrect the planting of cover crops, something his father abandoned because like many farmers, “my dad believed that cover crops were just a cheaper source of plant nutrients until he could afford synthetic fertilizers.” (Page 7).

Masumoto’s admits that his motivation for planting cover crops “seemed disconnected with farming” and cites his reasoning as a gesture for his wife, Marcy, and her displeasure of seeing “only the gray earth of winter outside our kitchen window” and to nurture her “dreams of spring walks through the soft clover with the baby in her arms.” (Page 8).

It is later that a fellow organic farmer friend introduces Masumoto to the real benefits of cover crops as it relates to natural farming. Cover crops provide erosion control, improve soil structure, increase organic matter, scavenge soil nutrients, suppress weeds and pests, and some can be used as forage for livestock. But not all cover crops accomplish all these goals, each one has its own unique qualities and must be managed differently and many of them work even better when they are planted together on the same ground.

Armed with this new knowledge, Masumoto decides to expand his cover crop planting and considers it, “more art than work”, and a metaphor for hope, “planting hope that the seeds will germinate, hope that they will add life to the farm and even help save the wonderful taste of my fruits,” and labels his fields a crazy quilt of cover crops, “some intended, , some a product of nature’s whims,” but all of it “weaving the texture of life into my farm.”(Page 11).

Looking at weeds through a new lens

In the Chapter 3 Masumoto laments about the crucial assault from the armies of weeds that he must contend with. He describes his tumultuous relationship with weeds and the relentless strategies used to rid his fields of anything that is not a peach tree or a grape vine, with the ultimate goal being a “clean” field.

Masumoto decides to rethink his relationship with weeds, as he changes course away from barren, sterile landscapes. He reasons that juicy grapes and luscious peaches are meant to come from a land that is alive and green most of the year. When a farmer friend started referring to weeds as “natural grasses, which didn’t sound as evil as weeds,” Masumoto decides to embrace nature instead of trying to control it. He looks at his weeds as part of the natural system at work on his land and allows nature to take over his farm. With this change of heart, Masumoto asserts he has very few weeds on his farm. “I removed them in a single day using a very simple method. I simply redefined what I call a weed.” (Page 31).

References

Masumoto, D. M. (1995). *Epitaph for a peach: Four seasons on my family farm*. NY: Harper Collins Publishers.

Response:

In response to your discussion point, "Masumoto values the land and his neighbors have also verbalized their appreciation, (Masumoto, 1995 p. 16), I was really amused when Masumoto was describing his neighbor’s reaction to the evolution of his wildflowers.

I particularly liked his wife Marcy’s explanation for why the neighbors were so stunned to learn that Masumoto actually planted the wildflowers. For years, the neighbor has been observing Masuoto’s “wild” farming methods and cover crops, but the neighbor does not realize that planting the wildflowers was done intentionally and that the wildflowers didn’t just magically appear as a manifestation of deciding to farm naturally. Even though this exchange was entertaining, it is also sad because it illustrates the general lack of awareness regarding natural farming practices and ecological responsibility and the challenges and conscious efforts that go into these practices.