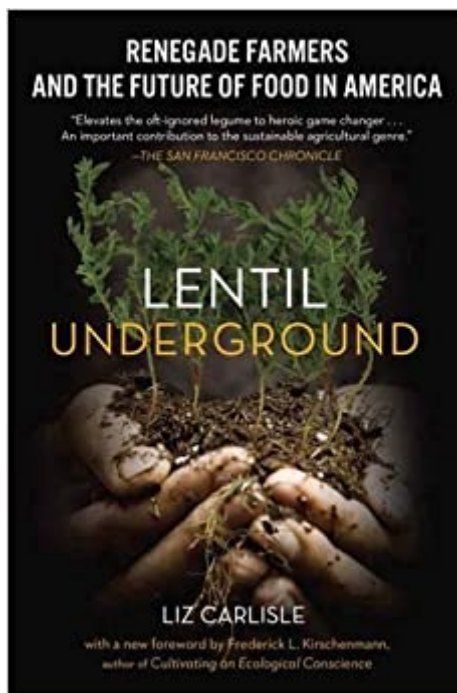




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# Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers And The Future Of Food In America



## Synopsis

A protégé of Michael Pollan shares the story of a little known group of renegade farmers who defied corporate agribusiness by launching a unique sustainable farm-to-table food movement. The story of the Lentil Underground begins on a 280-acre homestead rooted in America's Great Plains: the Oien family farm. Forty years ago, corporate agribusiness told small farmers like the Oiens to "get big or get out." But twenty-seven-year-old David Oien decided to take a stand, becoming the first in his conservative Montana county to plant a radically different crop: organic lentils. Unlike the chemically dependent grains American farmers had been told to grow, lentils make their own fertilizer and tolerate variable climate conditions, so their farmers aren't beholden to industrial methods. Today, Oien leads an underground network of organic farmers who work with heirloom seeds and biologically diverse farm systems. Under the brand Timeless Natural Food, their unique business-cum-movement has grown into a million dollar enterprise that sells to Whole Foods, hundreds of independent natural foods stores, and a host of renowned restaurants. From the heart of Big Sky Country comes this inspiring story of a handful of colorful pioneers who have successfully bucked the chemically-based food chain and the entrenched power of agribusiness's one percent, by stubbornly banding together. Journalist and native Montanan Liz Carlisle weaves an eye-opening and richly reported narrative that will be welcomed by everyone concerned with the future of American agriculture and natural food in an increasingly uncertain world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Advance Praise for *Lentil Underground* "What does it take to farm sustainably" and make a living? Liz Carlisle tells the engrossing story of the "audacity rich but capital poor" Montana farmers who thought lentils were the answer and stuck with them until proved right. Anyone who dreams of starting a farm or wants to know how organic farmers can overcome the obstacles they face will be inspired by this book.

"Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of *Food Politics* "These farmers demonstrate how to build democracy and build soils at the same time. What a deal!"

"Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Diet for a Small Planet* and *EcoMind* "Liz Carlisle's new book is an absolute treasure" actual stories of real farmers in a part of Montana, some of whom found that their industrial farming practices were a "losing game" and some who discovered that locally adapted organic farming could be resilient and economically successful. It is a must read for anyone interested in the future of food in America.

"Frederick Kirschenmann, Author of *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience* "Who knew? This book tells the fascinating story from one corner of the ongoing rural renaissance "it will resonate and fascinate, and it will leave you looking for ways to get involved yourself."

"Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy* "All of civilization rests on agriculture, and so it follows that real revolutions begin in the soil, which is why the stories of real revolutions must be reported from the ground up, as Liz Carlisle has done so competently in *Lentil Underground*. Read it, engage the real revolutionaries and begin to understand why their work is so vital to all of us."

"Richard Manning, author of *Against the Grain* "Who'd have thought that a book about lentil farming could be a page-turner? With a voice as clear and powerful on the page as it is onstage, Liz Carlisle writes the struggles of Montana's farmers as an epic. Their battles with food, finance, health care, and modern capitalism are both inspiring and a timely reminder that populism needn't be a dirty word."

"Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved* and research professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin "Praise for Liz Carlisle

Liz Carlisle holds a BA from Harvard University and a PhD in geography from the University of California at Berkeley. Carlisle is also a country music singer-songwriter who has opened shows for Travis Tritt, LeAnn Rimes, and Sugarland. She currently lives in Berkeley, California.

This is the inspiring story of a group of dryland prairie farmers in Montana who broke the yoke of large corporate agribusiness to develop an organic way of farming where they, rather than large companies, controlled their destinies. A young farmer, Dave Oien, was the first of the group to begin

experimenting with organically grown lentils that would both restore the soil and provide a healthy food to market to the public. Over the years these farmers moved from a monocropping, chemically based system dependent on large agribusiness to an organic one that ended their dependency on expensive chemical fertilizers. With little information available at the time from state universities, they developed their own methods, experimenting with crops, learning to process the lentils and creating their own markets. Under the name, "Timeless Natural Food", they now sell on the internet and to natural food stores and popular restaurants all over the country. In addition to growing their lentils and other crops that restore fertility to the land, some have created habitat in their fields for wildlife, including bees and other pollinators so necessary for the crops. This success story is a wonderful example of what our agriculture can become in an era where small farmers are challenged to make a living, our land and climate are under assault and people have difficulty finding healthy foods to feed their families. This book is well written and easily understood by non-farmers such as myself. *Lentil Underground* is a great book for those interested in how our food is grown and the future of farming in this country.

Good books are good books, and a good read is always a rare and enjoyable time....AND every once in a long while a book comes along that is a life changer. *The Lentil Underground* is one of those rare books that may well change your whole outlook on a vital topic, American agriculture. My wife and I are foodies and avid vegetable gardeners and we have long known that mainstream agriculture in the United States is just not right. While we are producing a huge amount of food in our country, almost all of it is of a questionable quality. Worse than that is that our methods are generally not sustainable for a growing population in a growing world. Huge applications of soluble fertilizers, much of which run off into local streams, tilling on a grand scale that dehumanizes the farmers who feed us all. Monoculture crops rather than diversity. All of these aspects are totally dependent on fossil fuel at every step of the way. All have the profit margin as the only guiding goal. None of these methods are sustainable. We are told by the big agribusiness industries that small farming methods can never feed the world and theirs is the only way. Liz Carlisle totally explodes that fantasy with her account of the farming group that she calls "the lentil underground". A small and steadily growing group of real, family farmers who are producing good food at good prices. And, there is no need for concern that when you buy from them you are despoiling the environment. Probably the greatest thing about the book is that it introduces you to a bunch of real people - foodies - who make their living feeding folks while improving the very land they feed us from! Get to know them a little, maybe even talk to them (yes they are reachable) and you'll find very quickly that

they are a hard working and friendly bunch who will be happy to connect you with other safe and sustainable sources for the foods they don't grow. Need beans or grains, the very staples of life? Want to know where what you eat comes from and who grows and handles it? Like good tasty foods produced with love and sweat? Read this book! Good things ARE happening in American agriculture and the Lentil Underground is a great, eye opening, fun to read book.

This is a surprising and terrific book. It's surprising because not many C&W singers produce a well-written and well-researched book on an extremely important topic. Well, I'll bet none have. I loved the book - it was a genuine page-turner because I really did want to know how things would turn out. I have never been to Montana, but I did grow up on a farm (in Iowa) so I had empathy for the underdog going for me. The popular view of farmers is that they cherish their independence. That's true for most of them but that independence often comes at a cost. When the government's programs reward the farmer only for doing what she doesn't want to do, she must choose between economic comfort and proceeding along a better path. Add to the government's intransigence, entrenched consumer preferences and you have a prescription for farmer frustration. There was plenty of that throughout the book, but by having a strong sense of commitment and the help of like-minded friends, a small group of Montana farmers prevailed. They made a difference we should all be grateful to them for showing us a good idea: to respect and support the soil, can be put to use. Thanks to Ms. Carlisle and all her Montana farmer friends for this inspirational story.. At difficult times like these farmers need one another, and that's this about is all about. A small handful of like-minded farmers found and gave encouragement to their wide-spread neighbors (in Montana, what isn't wide-spread?) Growing lentils was a messy, and largely unproven, form of agriculture.

A survey of a handful of farmers who have, over time, created an industry from "whole cloth" and improved their soil in the process. Enjoyed reading about the process and the iconoclasts who were determined to make it work. I now buy only organic lentils and ask if they are from this producer.

This is such an inspiring story. Well told by the author. I even bought a two pack of black lentils here on after I finished the book. I read a library copy of the book then bought a copy here for a friend.

A ripping good read - do you have to care about the lowly lentil to enjoy this book? Nah. It's a captivating tale that any reader can enjoy.

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