

The Bahá'í Village Granary: Spiritual Underpinnings and Applications to North America

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Abstract

'Abdu'l-Bahá's monetized village granary helps lay the systemic foundations of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritualized New World Economic Order for both rural and urban society. It is the capstone of God's progressive revelation for rural institutions for the sustainable use of natural resources. Village granaries are needed because agriculture has become materialistic, industrialized, and closed to the employment of human labor. Without such granaries, the production input "spirit" will continue to be neglected as a guide to rural development, ecological conservation, economic stability, equitable employment, adequate institutions, and universal values. Economic projections for progressively implementing a monetized village granary on a Canadian Bahá'í farm show that the problems of start-up cost, access to rural resources, and lack of reciprocity can be overcome by volunteer, apprentice, and pioneer labor as well as by such cooperative projects as joint maple production.

Résumé

Le grenier de village monnayable d'Abdu'l-Bahá a aidé à établir les fondements systémiques du nouvel ordre mondial économique spiritualisé que Bahá'u'lláh a institué, tant pour la société rurale que urbaine. Clef de voute de la révélation progressive de Dieu en ce qui a trait aux institutions rurales destinées à assurer l'utilisation durable des ressources naturelles, les greniers de villages sont une nécessité pour contrer le matérialisme, l'industrialisation et l'aliénation de la main-d'œuvre qui caractérisent aujourd'hui l'agriculture. Sans les greniers de village, l'« esprit » investi à l'étape de la production continuera d'être négligé au lieu de servir de guide au développement rural, à la conservation écologique, à la stabilité économique, à l'emploi équitable, et à l'établissement d'institutions adéquates et de valeurs universelles. Les projections économiques se rapportant à la mise en place progressive d'un système de grenier de village monnayable sur une ferme canadienne appartenant à des bahá'ís démontre que les problèmes liés aux frais de démarrage d'entreprise, à l'accès aux ressources rurales et au manque de réciprocité peuvent être surmontés grâce au recours à une main d'œuvre comprenant des bénévoles, des apprentis et des pionniers, et par la mise en place de projets de coopération, tels qu'un projet de partenariat en acériculture.

Resumen

El granero aldeano monetizado de 'Abdu'l-Bahá ayuda a establecer los cimientos sistémicos del Nuevo Orden Económico Mundial espiritualizado de Bahá'u'lláh para la sociedad tanto rural como urbana. Es la albardilla de la revelación progresiva por Dios de instituciones rurales para el uso sustentable de recursos naturales. Se necesitan los graneros aldeanos porque la agricultura se ha vuelto materialista, industrializada, y cerrada al empleo de la mano de obra humana. Sin ellos, el "espíritu" de energía contribuyente como elemento de la producción continuará siendo desaprovechada como norma para el desarrollo rural, la conservación ecológica, la estabilidad

económica, el empleo equitativo, instituciones adecuadas, y valores universales. Proyectos económicos para la ejecución progresiva de un granero aldeano monetizado en una granja bahá'í canadiense demuestran que los problemas asociados con costo de inicio, acceso a recursos rurales, y falta de reciprocidad; pueden superarse usando mano de obra voluntarios, aprendices y pioneros y con proyectos cooperativos tales como la producción mancomunada de arce.

The Relative Decline of Agriculture

Agriculture is pivotal to humankind in that it supplies our basic needs for food, clothing, and often shelter, medicine, and energy. Since human beings left hunting for a sedentary life, crop and livestock production has been an integral part of their social, economic, and cultural development. Globally, agrarian work has directly employed more than half the world's population for the last 5,000 years,¹ and many great cities still occupy sites chosen because they were highly favorable to agricultural production. Agriculture was even perceived as part of the sacred order, through which worshipful actions towards the "Earthmother" or "Nature" contributed to crop growth and harvest, and, by extension, to the prosperity of collective life.

Despite these roles, the onset of the Industrial Age at the end of the eighteenth century gradually relegated agriculture far beneath industrial production in economic importance. In highly urbanized, industrial, rich countries, much of the labor force is currently employed in the industrial and service sectors. In the United States, for example, only 2 to 3 per cent of the labor force directly produce food and fiber. In less industrialized countries, the proportion is higher, but national planning organizations intensify urbanization by according higher priority to urban than to rural development.

In contrast to these trends, Bahá'u'lláh clearly emphasized agriculture as the future basis for socioeconomic institutions and the development of civilization in the New World Order:

Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others. (*Lawḥ-i-Dunyá* [Tablet of the World], *Tablets* 90)

This article explores the possibility that, through a reverse swing of the social pendulum, a higher percentage of the workforce may once again become involved in the agricultural sector as part of humankind's maturation. More specifically, the article explores the questions: In what ways is agriculture important? Why should agriculture come first? Is farm work more or less fundamental than other work? This article answers these questions by focusing on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings on how rural communities and even cities can be reorganized so as to hold spiritual and material aspects in better dynamic balance. The centerpiece of these writings is the village granary or storehouse, which refers to the pooling of physical or financial resources to meet the needs and security of all individuals. Far from applying only to countries where much of the population lives off the land, elements of the village granary and other Bahá'í rural institutions can be used to initiate agricultural development projects for North America's industrialized agriculture and cities.

¹ In several countries, this situation prevails today.

Spirit as the “Quintessential” Production Input

Despite Bahá'u'lláh's call to rediscover the spiritual side of agriculture, farm managers normally consider only four inputs related to agricultural production: (1) Land (including forests and water), which makes food and fiber production physically possible; (2) Labor, which refers to the human workforce; (3) Capital, which includes not only money but also physical livestock, equipment, buildings, and granaries; (4) Human capital, which refers to how well decisions are made and implemented based on the level of education, the structure and process of decisions (authoritarian, group consultation, etc.). Farm managers have generally failed to recognize a fifth, moral factor that is integral to the Bahá'í vision of agriculture: spirit. Spirit refers to the service to others and the love of God that transform labor into an act of worship.²

Strengths and Weaknesses of Modern Agriculture

This conceptual gap has not prevented agriculture from contributing to human well-being, particularly in industrialized nations. Most obviously, sophisticated plant-breeding techniques, irrigation, fertilization, and harvest and post-harvest technologies make farming less arduous and permit production at the lowest cost. Two to three farmers can now feed over a hundred people. In the past, under the best of circumstances, farmers barely managed to feed themselves, with only an occasional surplus. The high risks of farming are now largely offset by insurance programs that permit producers to weather difficult years. In addition, a varied and low-cost diet has freed most people in most countries from the fear of famine that haunted countless past generations.

However, modern agriculture trails in its furrow five perverse effects that cast doubt on the pertinence of current rural institutions:

1. Accelerating *ecological destruction* of land and water resources.
2. *Economic instability*, especially with respect to monetary capital, prices, and interest rates.
3. *Unequal distribution* of access to agricultural employment and thus to food on the part of agricultural workers. More than a hundred years after the death of Bahá'u'lláh, agriculture is the principal occupation of only 2-15% of the population of North America and Western Europe. On other continents, underemployed or disenfranchised farmers compete for a better living in the unsanitary slums of swollen metropolises.
4. *Lack of institutions* to distribute and manage the natural-resource heritage of humanity. The “delinking”³ associated with free trade has dismantled several support programs to farmers. In many areas, such trends set in motion a chain reaction that unravels the very fabric of rural society: declining village population leads to the closing of services such as post offices, schools, businesses, and, ultimately, abandonment of the village itself.
5. *Absence of universal values* that could inspire and guide human beings more fully than the maximization of profit based on market prices. Agricultural developers still view land, animals, and workers as simple production factors that must be adapted to the main goals of economic efficiency and high productivity, and eventually transferred to other economic sectors. Because the tools, language, and short-term horizon used to plan

² Some might claim that this fifth factor is a new idea. In fact, medieval monks included spirit as the “quintessential” factor, literally, the fifth essence necessary to life. It was the secular tendency of the subsequent Enlightenment that caused Western thinkers to lose sight of spirit in the scientific realm.

³ That is, agricultural support policies can no longer be tied directly to specific crops or technologies.

industry and business neglect the particularities of agriculture, overall well-being, and ecological balance, the farmer who uses sustainable technology and other conservation measures often suffers a short-term competitive disadvantage compared to a less conscientious neighbor. In an era of freer trade, only worldwide legislation could establish and enforce the necessary environmental norms for agriculture.

Bahá'u'lláh's Remedies for These Problems

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the World not only anticipated these problems with stunning accuracy but also laid out five principles that will allow humankind to undo the damage (*Tablets* 89–90). First, as noted in the quotation above, agriculture constitutes a premier strategic element for conserving the earth's resources and assuring the material well-being of all. Second, rural savings in the form of *voluntary* self-taxation are necessary to pay for the education of children as future citizens of the earth.⁴ Third, Bahá'u'lláh promotes fellowship, kindness, and other feelings of reciprocity as the ethical basis for redistributing economic opportunities more equitably. Fourth, the Lesser Peace⁵ offers a vision of the institutional basis for an emerging New World Order. Finally, an auxiliary universal language could promote worldwide spiritual values by eliminating barriers to communication and understanding among peoples. Close inspection shows that each of these basic principles is linked to a key production input in agriculture (Table 1).

Table 1. The System of Inputs and Principles underlying Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order

Sphere	Current Problem	Production Input	Principle of World Order
Ecology	Destruction of nature	Land and water	Agriculture first
Economy	Low savings/ undereducation	Capital	Savings for education
Society	Unequal access to rural jobs, food	Labor	Justice, amity, equity
Institutions	Lack of spiritual institutions	Human capital	The Lesser Peace
Spirituality	Lack of universal values	Spirit and morality	Auxiliary language, Universal Peace

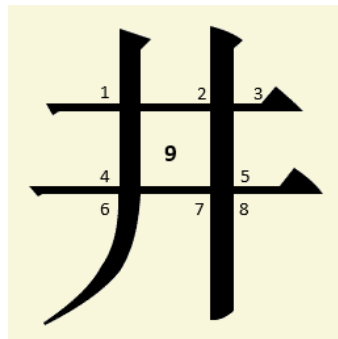
Progressive Revelation and the Concept of the Village Granary

'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of the village granary is the chief agricultural institution for addressing the current problems laid out in Table 1. As with the progressive revelation of other dimensions of God's covenant, the Bahá'í granary updates and deepens the theological and institutional bases of the religions of the past. For example, as early as the fourth century B.C., the Chinese philosopher

⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá would elaborate the village granary and common fund as appropriate institutions for accumulating such savings ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundation* 38–44).

⁵ The Lesser Peace refers to the elimination of hostility among nations through a mechanism whereby all other nations will unite to stop any country from waging war on its neighbor. By contrast, the Most Great Peace will involve the full realization of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, through the open acknowledgment of Bahá'í principles and institutions by world leaders.

Mencius proposed the essentially practical concept of the “well-field” to promote food security at the sub-village level. To Mencius, the Chinese character for well:



suggested that a group of eight households could each farm an individual peripheral field and leave the ninth, central field for cooperative production, tax payment, and storage. If one of the households had a bad harvest, its members could survive the year by drawing from the common granary. This was one of the first examples of what modern economists call “food security” strategies.

This same concern for food security is found in Judaism, which attached great importance to granaries or “stores.” For example, the Torah underscored the crucial need to keep granaries full against the risk of famine:

Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed. (Joel 1: 16-17)⁶

In addition to food security, we begin to find in Jewish civilization a spiritual dimension associated with granaries. According to Malachi, the act of storage was the will of God for humankind:

Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. (Malachi 3: 10)

Christianity further enriched these concepts of granary. For example, St. John the Baptist brought an allegorical dimension to granaries when he compared the faithful to grains of wheat that should be stored there:

. . . he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will bum with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11–12)

And Jesus called upon people to sow and store in order to realize their full potential:

⁶ This and all subsequent New and Old Testament citations are from the Revised Standard Edition of the Bible.

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! (Luke 12:24)

Muhammad lent an even more complete vision to the social and spiritual roles of storehouses. He elaborated and deepened the vision of Malachi noted above to explain why and how God is the Supreme Manager of the granaries:

And the earth—We stretched it forth, and cast on it firm mountains, and We caused to grow therein of every thing justly weighed, and there appointed for you livelihood, and for those you provide not for.

Naught is there, but its treasures are with Us, and We send it not down but in a known measure.

And We loose the winds fertilising, and We send down out of heaven water, then We give it to you to drink, and you are not its treasurers. . . . (Sura El-Hijr [#15]:18–25)

This astonishing passage gives a clear image of the divine attributes towards which any program of community granary management should strive. In fact, one's very belief in God depends on establishing clear laws for the management of granaries:

And [God] will teach [Jesus] the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel, to be a Messenger to the Children of Israel saying "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. . . . I will inform you too of what things you eat, and what you treasure up in your houses. Surely in that is a sign for you, if you are believers." (Sura of The House of Imran [#3]: 43)

Despite these successive enrichments of the granary as an initially practical concept to stabilize access to food, it fell to the Bahá'í Revelation to give the last word and the most complete vision to date of the spiritual economy of the village.

Rural and Economic Measures in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

The village granary is only one of many interrelated divine rural institutions foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. In terms of efficiency and resource conservation, for example, Bahá'u'lláh prohibited alcohol and opium production and consumption (D1y xi–xiii),⁷ which would free land and human energy to produce more of humanity's food needs. He encouraged study of agricultural science, which would be of use to humanity (D3m) and to combat illness and famine. He promoted moderation in the hunting of animals (D1r), as have Native peoples, to conserve faunal diversity.⁸

⁷ . This system of codes is taken from Shoghi Effendi's *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, an outline of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* organized by theme, which we find more appropriate to our present purpose. For greater detail, we encourage the reader to consult the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* directly.

⁸ To integrate these concepts, the Bahá'í economist Giuseppe Robiati proposes that instead of maximizing net profits, we attempt to minimize the entropy created per unit of production of material, intellectual, or spiritual basic needs. Better coordination of the many uses of land (way of life, tourism, fishing, hunting, recreation, forestry) is compatible with this definition.

The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* enumerates still other policies to increase justice and equity, in both rural and non-rural areas. One finds, for example, a law which sets the dowry a husband can give a wife (C1j) to assure the financial independence of the bride while preserving the financial resources of the groom's family. Inheritance laws provide for the needs of all (C3) and help to avoid quarreling. Such measures would correct current problems and injustices, notably in certain rural regions of India. In addition, Bahá'u'lláh stresses the importance of gifts to the local House of Justice (D1u, D1t). He also encourages newspapers and other media to praise acts of hospitality publicly (D3q viii). Taken together, these measures would reinforce the spirit of reciprocity and unity necessary for the smooth functioning of the village granary.

To promote economic equilibrium and peace in the village as elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh adds still other laws to prohibit games of chance (Dy xiii), which go against the very spirit of a stabilizing granary; to punish theft severely (D1y xvii); to settle all debts before an inheritance passes to the heirs (C3i); and to balance the macroeconomic distribution of the wealth of nations through both the *Ḥuqúqu'lláh* and spontaneous gifts on the part of richer countries (D1b). Indeed, today's economy is characterized by disequilibria at many levels, which can only be corrected by moderation among all the elements of a system:

The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.

. . . All other things are subject to this same principle of moderation. (*Gleanings* 342–43)

Agriculture is no exception to this statement. On the material level, we must balance food, money, and commercial flows, as well as harmonize exploitation and conservation, desires and needs, specialization and diversification, and Northern and Southern economies. On the social level, there is imbalance between employers and those seeking employment, men and women, rich and poor, city and country, the individual and the group, hard work and leisure, competition and cooperation, individualism and collectivism, and owners and workers. On the spiritual level, rural life requires greater harmony between the material and the spiritual, and between science and religion.

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh lists measures for development and socioeconomic evolution toward a New World Order. He encourages people to develop cities and countries (D3w), whether as pioneers⁹ or through other development projects. In the rural sector in particular, this implies a sustained, gradual but positive transition from economic institutions based exclusively on I market competition and private property toward more varied economic forms that give rise to a higher level of cooperation and sharing.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Elaboration of the Village Granary

To integrate and implement the laws laid out in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called for a renewal of divine institutions beginning with the farming class:

⁹ For Bahá'ís, a pioneer is one of the first to introduce and/or promote the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in a new geographical setting.

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has given instructions regarding every one of the questions confronting humanity. . . .

First and foremost is the principle that to all the members of the body politic shall be given the greatest achievements of the world or humanity. Each one shall have the utmost welfare and well-being. To solve this problem we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations* 39)

He chose the occasion of a talk in Montreal in 1912¹⁰ to describe the specific workings of the village granary. As elaborated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the granary provides first of all a means of pooling food and other agricultural output better to meet the needs and security of all individuals in the community. But the success of this physical granary also depends upon the creation of a monetary "granary," called the General Fund, designed to protect farmers during difficult periods, to conserve the economic viability of their farms, and to maintain the integrity of their work and family life. The revenues for the General Fund come mainly from a tithe based on net income. Interestingly, what is taxed is not the total income of each worker, but the surplus over the needs of the family. According to the value of such surplus income, the rate of taxation increases, without discouraging the effort invested by the farmer to increase income. Other sources of revenue for the Fund are animal sales, mineral resources, unclaimed inheritances, and discovered treasure.

Without such a fund, farmers would often suffer deprivation, leaving them vulnerable to risks, uncertainty, and unscrupulous individuals seeking to take unfair advantage of their misfortune. The General Fund also seeks to satisfy the needs of those who for reasons of infirmity or other difficulties cannot fend for themselves. Such people could thus preserve their personal integrity, rank, and independence as well as develop the divine spark residing within them. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains: "each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer."¹¹

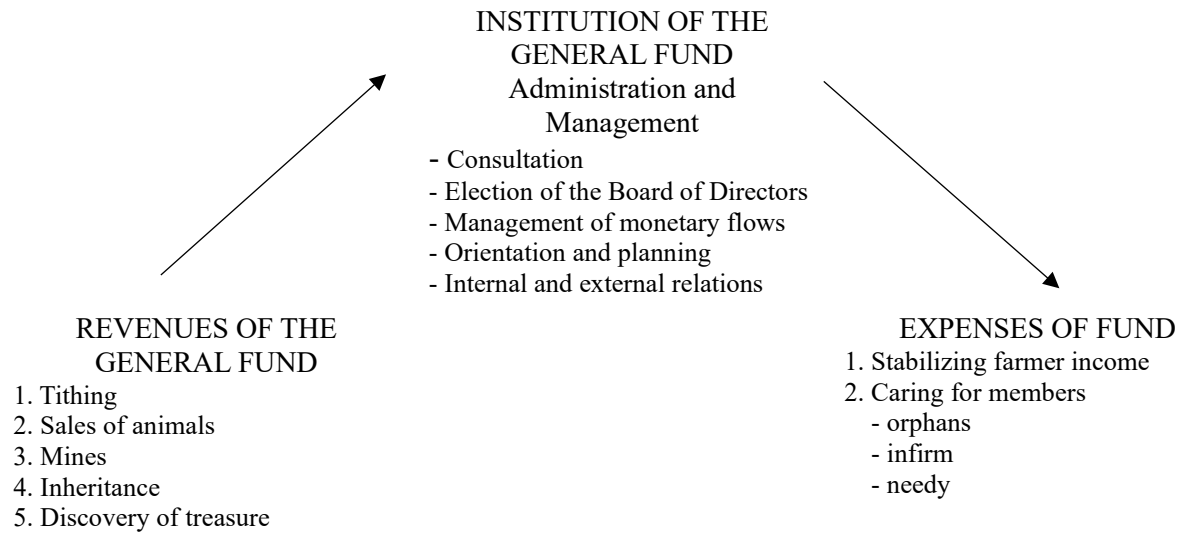
The monetary aspect of the General Fund not only renders the village granary more malleable and adaptable to diverse circumstances but also links it more efficiently with other regions, as consistent with the need for universal values (Table 1), notably the oneness of human beings based on reciprocity and cooperation. If we learn that a region of the world is in great need, our consciences cannot accept that its people remain in misery while we enjoy comfort. To reflect these values, the Fund is "open": when there is a surplus, part is sent on to a regional or national fund for more equitable distribution to all the earth's people.¹² The General Fund as a modern-day village granary is summarized in Figure 1.

¹⁰ This text is to be found in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations* 38–44.

¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity* 38.

¹² It should be stressed that this broad geographic impact of a granary system is not new. In ancient Mesopotamia, for example, the granary likely also doubled as a depot for interregional trade and economic interdependence (Fortin). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision serves to enlarge and diversify the roles of the physical and monetary granaries to promote interdependence among peoples.

Figure 1: The General Fund-Income and Expenses



To encourage, maintain, and support the installation or expansion of agricultural or rural projects, this monetary granary would be administered according to Bahá'í administrative concepts. Its initial mandate would be to launch projects consistent with Bahá'í economic and social teachings. Figure 2 helps to clarify the central role of the General Fund for promoting overall rural development.

Figure 2: Suggested Development Project Inspired by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's General Fund

<p>PROJECT DEVELOPMENT RELATIONS</p> <p>Worker incentives through measures to encourage production, processing, and marketing enterprises</p>		<p>EXTERNAL RELATIONS</p> <p>Create exchanges/solidarity with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other villages - Other districts - Other regions - Other countries
<p>INSTITUTION OF THE GENERAL FUND Administration and Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation - Election of the Board of Directors - Management of monetary flows - Orientation and planning - Internal and external relations 		
<p>ASSISTANCE FUNCTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income support for farmers with poor harvests - Aid to needy 	<p>OTHER FUNCTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage youth to stay in the region - Integration of immigrants - Discovery of new products 	<p>SYSTEM FOUNDATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to education - Encourage communication - Foster harmonious links with members within and outside the collectivity

Relations with City Dwellers

Initially, the Fund would be set up through the voluntary contributions of any person, Bahá'í or not, including city dwellers wishing to promote rural development. According to Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, the rate of interest should be fair to both parties. Specifically, the rate of interest could maintain the value of the investors' money against inflation (say, the rate they would earn on savings deposits in a bank), while being more advantageous than the current borrowing rate for the farm investor. Thereafter, agricultural producers could contribute to the Fund in a manner appropriate to their situation.

At the outset, the Fund would be limited to supporting agricultural projects. Gradually, as the Fund expanded and other agricultural firms subscribed and contributed, other functions could be added. For example, the assistance function aims to assist in difficult periods, either because of bad harvests or because of major drop in the market price of a key agricultural commodity.¹³ Relations with the external world are desirable, either through exchange of information or eventually to aid in establishing similar projects in other regions. Because the full involvement of young people in the life of society is difficult in modern agriculture, a youth "year of service" function could be conceived and added. Along similar lines, one could intentionally create employment for immigrants.

Relations with the Local Spiritual Assembly

The General Fund is conceived to operate at the local level according to Bahá'í administrative procedure and to be open to both Bahá'ís and others. This means that in a village with at least nine adult Bahá'ís, the relationship between the General Fund and the local Spiritual Assembly must be clarified. The Fund has its own administrative structure and fulfils certain functions that closely parallel those of the Spiritual Assembly, notably the general well-being of the members and the extension of aid to those experiencing difficulty. In the spirit of the Bahá'í administrative order, it is difficult to imagine that the General Fund would operate independently from the local Spiritual Assembly. Rather, given that it possesses its own board of directors, we may foresee a tutor-apprentice relationship. The institution of the General Fund would thus receive inspiration and advice from the local Spiritual Assembly in order to guide its evolution and priorities.¹⁴

Innovative Contributions of the Bahá'í Vision of Village Granaries

The agrarian system proposed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá rests above all on a feeling of reciprocity: the unified body of humankind must come alive so that the suffering of one member of the collectivity calls the others into action to assuage individual suffering, for that suffering cannot but affect the entire organism. In addition, the village granary invokes the sacredness of God's creation, detachment from income and consumption drives, the spirit of service, and the central role of family and community.

¹³ Regulating markets, according to Shoghi Effendi, then becomes of crucial importance (*World Order* 204).

¹⁴ Within our current projects, several other situations can occur, such as the establishment of an Investment Fund as a socioeconomic project in a locality without a local Spiritual Assembly or the extension of a project to a district embracing several localities. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Board of Directors is composed of "wise" persons in the village, who work independently of the Spiritual Assembly, but with the blessing of the Assembly in a spirit of full fellowship and cooperation. It is necessary to seek the tutelage of an administrative institution in any Bahá'í socioeconomic development project.

The Sacredness of God's Creation

Nature is the creation of God. It reveals our oneness with all other components of that creation, as well as our position within it. Humans must respect Nature but avoid becoming attached to it. We must humbly recognize that it is from Nature that we draw our entire subsistence and the constituent elements of our bodies. We may enjoy the benefits Nature procures, but we will not conserve even the minutest molecule when our souls take flight.

Although long recognized as fundamental, particularly by Native peoples, this sacred aspect of our relation with Nature has over the past centuries been overshadowed by materialist preoccupations. Many now see our relation with land as an incessant struggle through which the land must be broken and subjugated. With the technological power placed in human hands today, the spirit of conquest must be transformed into one of collaboration, reciprocity, and humble acceptance of our dependence on the land:

They should conduct themselves in such manner that the earth upon which they tread may never be allowed to address to them such words as these: "I am to be preferred above you. For witness, how patient I am in bearing the burden which the husbandman layeth upon me. I am the instrument that continually imparteth unto all beings the blessings with which He Who is the Source of all grace hath entrusted me. Notwithstanding the honor conferred upon me, and the unnumbered evidences of my wealth—a wealth that supplieth the needs of all creation—behold the measure of my humility, witness with what absolute submissiveness I allow myself to be trodden beneath the feet of men. . . ." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 7–8)

Detachment from Income and Consumption

Under the values of current society, the individual is considered alternately from two points of view: as a producer of income or a consumer of goods. There is no need to elaborate on this obviously materialistic vision. In contrast, the Bahá'í approach views the benefits flowing from Nature as both a bounty of the Creator and the means whereby God's servants may achieve the fundamental objectives of their lives. Bahá'u'lláh compares people to travelers through a country overflowing with riches that they are free to use but from which they must remain detached.

The Spirit of Service

Taking up a job or a profession in agriculture is one of the most powerful ways of realizing service to the collectivity and, by extension, to humankind as a whole. As noted, 'Abdu'l-Bahá considers the farmers to exceed other economic classes in the importance of their service. More generally, all work is consecrated as an act of worship, which elevates it well beyond essentially materialistic preoccupations.

Family and Community

A final value found in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on agriculture is the importance accorded to family and community life. Built on solid ties of unity among its members, the village or neighborhood

becomes a framework of life that places the individual in perspective and permits each to develop at a personal pace. Features like social aid, education of children, and the organization of social and cultural events give such collectivities a profound sense of solidarity with, and openness to, the planetary community. While this solidarity can happen anywhere, the countryside is considered by Bahá'u'lláh to be a propitious environment for the flourishing of the soul and Nature as a teacher of the signs of the Creator.

Village Granary Projects for North America

With such an abundant source of directives for solving the numerous problems of the current world system, the Bahá'í community is challenged to understand the needs of modern agriculture, detect its illnesses, and select the remedies enunciated by the divine physician, Bahá'u'lláh. We are called upon to adapt development projects to the diverse localities we inhabit.

In North America, one major challenge for agricultural projects is the start-up inertia, which threatens short- to medium-term economic viability. Start-up depends on acquiring, through rent, share, or purchase, land and other means of production, which in turn depends upon the prior possession of investment funds. A second, and perhaps cardinal, deficiency of the North American context is the overriding business atmosphere that forces agriculture to seek extremely high efficiency if it is to survive. To address this problem, farmers already use cooperation on a limited basis; this permits them to enjoy unique advantages by partially resisting the pressure to join the productivity race. But cooperation is doomed to fail if not infused with spiritual values. The system proposed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is based upon precisely these values of cooperation and reciprocity.

Projects should thus treat efforts at cooperation in such a way as to favor mutual aid and reciprocity among farmers. Such cooperation will encourage the creation and development of agricultural firms of a type rarely, if ever, promoted in North America. It could also foster synergy among agricultural firms of complementary types so as to create benefits to all parties greater than the sum of the parts. It could favor the participation of city dwellers in the rural sector, either by contributing to the monetary granary, by studying the rural setting during periodic stays, or by becoming involved in farm work during peak seasons.

The economic analyses summarized in Table 2 compare the current situation of a farm run by a Bahá'í couple in Warwick, Quebec, Canada, with three alternative farm structures. To test their practical feasibility, we estimated for each alternative, with the help of the farm couple, the expected gross and net incomes, level of risk, interest rate, new investment, labor hire, the number of cows in the dairy herd, and the number of sugar maples tapped.

The first column portrays the current situation of the farm. Because the farmers have not yet been able to incorporate socioeconomic or spiritual projects, they pursue the same goal as their neighbors: the maximization of net profits. No new agricultural or nonagricultural activities are explored, and there is no cooperation with other farms from the rural community. The levels of revenue and risk are nonetheless quite respectable.

Table 2. Predicted Economic Results for Alternative Farm Structures

Scenario Indicator	Current	B&B/ Apprentices	B&B/ Volunteers	Maple Granary
Gross income (\$K /yr.)	188	253	255	253
Net income (\$K/yr.)	61	81	88	84
Risk (\$/yr.)	5106	5990	6018	6053
Interest rate (%)	8.25	6.5	6.5	6.5
New investment (\$K)	0	74	74	88
Farm family labor (hrs.)	3000	3000	5500	5500
Hired labor. (hrs.)	0	2271	0	0
Dairy cattle (head)	33	40	40	40
Sugar maples (trees)	0	500	500	1500

The second column (Bed & Breakfast/Apprentices) represents the first step of a transition toward a village-based organization of agriculture and a better equilibrium between town and country. In addition to profit, the farmers' goals now include the contribution of young and urban Bahá'ís to the labor and capital resources of the farm. Specifically, this alternative involves increasing available capital by the creation of an embryonic General Fund, open to the family currently operating the farm, as well as to city dwellers desiring to invest their capital resources. The interest rate on the savings account for the city dweller (6.5%) is used as the lending rate of investment capital, a rate much more attractive than the current borrowing rate for farmers (8.25%). With the money thus collected, the farmers can put back into production a languishing sugar-maple stand of 500 trees on their property, complemented by the construction of a sugar shack¹⁵ for \$10,000. The sugar shack would be used intensively between the months of February and May (the season for tapping the trees and fresh syrup production) to serve traditional meals featuring syrup. Depending upon the capital attracted from Bahá'í investors, the farmer could also invest in a farm bed and breakfast for \$64,000. This bed and breakfast, an inn with five rooms, could be used throughout the year. Individuals or a Bahá'í family could take responsibility for the inn on a voluntary basis, one week at a time. Even if the rooms went empty half of the time and the couple charged a modest \$37.50 per room per night, the inn would earn \$34,000 per year.

All these activities imply a substantial increase in labor demand. For example, the bed and breakfast would require 1,750 hours per year, and maple sugar collection and processing 75 hours per year. To benefit from the complementarity of different types of professional and personal capacity within the Bahá'í community, city dwellers who did not have capital to invest could provide physical labor for production activities under apprenticeship programs for those wishing to learn to farm. In the beginning, these urban Bahá'ís and apprentices would typically not have enough expertise to work as efficiently as the family. However, their level of enthusiasm and spiritual attitude toward work would likely be greater than that of regular farm workers paid in cash. This labor would be paid "in kind" (food, lodging, beauty of the countryside, etc.), at the equivalent of only \$3 per hour, half the hourly market wage.

¹⁵ A sugar shack is a large wooden cabin where maple sap is simmered down into syrup in large vats. Traditionally in Quebec culture, it is the term for a place where families and friends meet in joy and celebration. Increasingly today, meals are served therein to paying guests.

The third alternative (Bed & Breakfast/Volunteers) builds upon alternative number two, but increases the level of reciprocity. Instead of apprentice farmworkers, whose availability could not always be counted upon, a second family of Bahá'í farmers¹⁶ would work full-time on the same farm, contributing 2,500 additional hours of permanent, non-family labor per year. Because apprentices are no longer considered, any additional labor would be hired at the market wage of \$6 per hour.

The final alternative in Table 2 goes beyond the farm gate to embrace the village. The postulates are the same as in the previous alternative, except that the Bahá'í farm couple would now combine the 2,500 maple trees of their neighbor with their own stand of 500 trees. Each farm enterprise would manage half the total trees (1,500), from which it would take the entire profit. Because of the greater quantity of syrup available for sale, the Bahá'í farm would increase investment in the sugar shack to \$15,000,17 plus 50% of the \$17,500 necessary for equipment jointly purchased with the neighbor on a cooperative basis. This alternative is called the Maple Granary because trees and sugar shack represent a resource common to the two farms.

The positive economic results of these successive alternatives confirm the possibility of making a logical transition to organizational forms concordant with the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Far from being in opposition, the goals of spiritual management on the one hand, and the maximization of net profits and the control of risks on the other, seem perfectly compatible.

Conclusions

The Bahá'í vision of the village granary integrates the five principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the World, the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and the details of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Montreal talk of 1912. As such, it represents the most recent covenant of God with humankind for the sustainable use of natural resources. Its unprecedented detail on both the material and spiritual levels is the capstone of the progressive revelation of rural institutions referred to in previous religions. The granary for this age is unique in its monetary nature, flexibility, unprecedented geographical interdependence, types of revenue and expenses, sacred respect for the land, detachment from income and consumption, spirit of service, and heightened emphasis on the family and community. Indeed, the monetized village granary and its offshoots help to lay the systemic foundations of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritualized New World Economic Order for the entire society.

Economic projections for an actual Bahá'í farm permit the detailed adaptation of such concepts to a concrete North American context. They show that the problems of start-up cost, short-term viability, overly competitive economic environment, closed access to rural resources on the part of the majority of the population, and lack of institutions of reciprocity can be overcome by a monetary granary called the General Fund; by volunteer, apprentice, and pioneer labor; and by such physical granaries as joint maple production. Through such projects, the full potential of the village granary could be achieved.

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¹⁶ For example, pioneers who migrate to Warwick after seeing an announcement in *Bahá'í Canada*.

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