

Wes Jackson grew up working on farms throughout South Dakota in the 1940s and 50s. During this time, he developed an understanding of hard work, while also being able to appreciate and learn the benefits of the diversity in plants and animals at the small farms on which he worked. This childhood experience, coupled with his time in higher education as a professor, were integral experiences to developing the philosophy that he teaches and researches today with his wife Dana. Together, they run an organization known as the Land Institute in Salinas, Kansas, where they have on-site student researchers working to solve the issue of environmental destruction caused by agriculture in today's world.

Jackson's philosophy centers around changing the agricultural system that currently exists, which uses annually planted crops like corn and soy as the base for most of the processed food products we consume. Jackson proposes using a perennial crop system, where a mix of different perennial plants are combined on a given plot of land to function as they would in a natural prairie ecosystem. Different plants will replenish different nutrients into the soil, meaning there is no need for synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Jackson's focus with this philosophy is to decrease raw inputs like fossil fuels in farming, while also building soil health to decrease erosion, which has been a large problem in the Midwest for decades. He and Dana emphasize the need for a completely new system, not just different methods that were developed and operate under the current system.

Although they envision their research continuing for 50-100 years before seeing their desired results, their philosophy has taken root across the world. It will take a change in mindset to switch conventional grain growing to a perennial model, but the possibility offers the potential for continued stable food production without the detrimental environmental effects that are quickly approaching irreversibility.

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