

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

Here in the Midwest it looks as though we are on the downside of winter as our temperatures soar into the 70's this week. I fear we are not yet done with the icy breath of the season – nor should we be. It's only February! Still, the sun feels good.

It's been awhile since I've written you; but today I have a couple of job possibilities and a good story so please, read on!

The Biomimicry Institute is looking for a [Visual Designer](#). They're a super group of people advancing an ever-advancing meme. So, if you have a passion for the nexus of business and our natural world as well as strong creative chops, give them a yell!

If your skills run more to finance, **River Network** is looking for a [Finance Director](#) but be quick! The deadline is looming. This nonprofit has, for years, helped local watershed groups manifest clean water through capacity-building, policy work and river restoration practices. (There are other water-related jobs listed at that site as well.)

And now, for a story of food and sustainable business practices and . . .

[The Starfish Who Fed the World](#)

Once upon a time in 1918, an Italian family man cogitating on how to make life better for his Brooklyn-based brood, "[rented a produce pushcart for \\$5 a week](#)". Over time Louis Balducci turned that business-on-wheels into a flourishing produce wholesale network servicing the entire Northeast down into the Mid-Atlantic.

A recent immigrant, Mr. Balducci became known for the high quality of all his fruits and vegetables. Without knowing it, he had become a cultural leader. As the years rolled by, the business grew. Today, Baldor Foods buys produce, as locally as they can from around the region, and then sells it to surrounding communities. Typical rags to riches story, right?

Now really, when have you ever known me to tell you a two paragraph story?

So, here's where sustainability . . . and perhaps a bit more . . . arrives at our table.

As companies often do, Baldor had decided it needed to look at areas where it could increase efficiencies. Thomas McQuillan, formerly a construction equipment company president, was tapped to address this task. He started looking at the usual places we think about when considering efficiency when he cast a critical eye on the waste bins where the vegetable and fruit trimmings were overflowing. Composting was a fair idea adopted already in a number of places; but that wasn't quite where he wanted to go with all that food.

Food.

It seems almost magical that at the very time our hero was contemplating food waste he got a call from Adam Kaye, a fellow New Yorker and chef from [Blue Hill Farm](#). He and colleague chef, Dan Barber, had begun a story of their own. They were creating delicious meals using the end bits of pasta, left-overs from the meat market and even fish bones for flavoring and even full dishes. Adam had now turned his eyes toward Thomas's veggie scraps.

In very little time Thomas reordered the letters of that unappealing label and came up with "SparCs" – a new product utilizing those previously landfill-bound veggie bits. He was not only addressing the waste stream, but upcycling this by-product into delicious restaurant food via his innovative colleagues. They were also profiting by creating an entire program around the array of cast-off culinary bits called [wastED](#). (The "ED" stands for the education they're dishing up to customers as they reduce mass in landfills and serve up tres magnifique meals at the same time.)

Our story could end here, but why stop? We're on a roll. Besides, you have got to be wondering about the starfish in the title by now, yes?

This is a short story so you have all the pieces. Food producer uses former "scraps" to create new income stream. Restaurant does the same. Both are thankfully derailing food to mouths instead of garbage trucks (with the ensuing costs to city and environment). So here's where the starfish comes into the story.

What happens when you cut a starfish in half? Amazingly, because of its decentralized neural net – it makes two starfish. (Those of you who have studied sustainability and biomimicry with me may remember how resilience can be gained through decentralization and redundancy. Well, here it is – case in point.) So what if we took a cut of the amazing story of Thomas, Adam and Dan and yes, reproduced that idea to help a new "starfish" grow elsewhere?

I referred earlier to Louis, from Baldor Foods, as being a cultural leader. He did, in fact, build a company with a culture of caring. This is one of the ingredients that can enable a company to not only look for inefficiencies, but to recognize a larger opportunity as it is exiting their building. A business model like this is not confined to New York City or the East Coast. Like a starfish, it lends itself to growing wherever you toss a piece of the original idea. Just like the network that has grown in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, this idea can grow a whole new starfish – as it were – wherever the idea is thrown in the waters of sustainable business practices.

A number of you – in fact most – are sustainabilists in one way or another. Some of you work in restaurants and in construction just like our heroes. At least one of you works for one of the largest food companies in the world. You're entrepreneurs. You're regional food leaders. You live in far-flung places from Greene County to Great Britain and beyond. The business of upcycling food scraps could indeed be a bit like a starfish, regenerating from place to place while feeding people good food and taking a bite out of the over [200 million tons of food wasted](#) internationally.

"But I already have a good job," you may say. That's fantastic! Then just take this short piece to your favorite restaurant. Or forward it to a local food company. Or give it to your favorite organic farmer. It's an idea ready for decentralization. It's ready to grow.

My thanks to Patty Cantrell, [regional food organizer](#), for calling my attention to this [story](#) and its possibilities.

Best to you and our whole world too,

Margo

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Give good people good information and they'll do good things.

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