

Organic Farming as Spiritual Practice and Practical Spirituality at Sunburst Farms

Dusty Hoesly

ABSTRACT: The Brotherhood of the Sun, a new religious movement founded in 1969 in Santa Barbara, California, operated America's largest organic farm and was the largest shipper of organic produce in the U.S. in the mid- to late-1970s. Despite this achievement, both the Brotherhood of the Sun and its Sunburst Farms are largely missing from scholarly work on organic food, communes, and new religions. This article remedies these absences by situating the Brotherhood of the Sun, Sunburst Farms, and Sunburst Natural Foods within the contexts of countercultural new religious movements, back-to-the-land organic farming and communal living enterprises, and founder Norman Paulsen's unique spiritual visions and teachings. Using original archival and interview data, I argue that operating Sunburst Farms was both an embodied spiritual practice and a pragmatic commercial enterprise that financed the group's agrarian utopia while spreading its organic and mystical ideals.

KEYWORDS: Sunburst, Brotherhood of the Sun, Norman Paulsen, organic farming, health food, spiritual practice

In the mid- to late-1970s, Sunburst Farms was America's largest organic farm and the largest shipper of organic produce.¹ It managed four ranches on thousands of acres, four organic farmers markets, two health food restaurants, a dairy, a whole-grain organic bakery, a fresh juice-bottling plant, a fishery, a wholesale warehouse, and a trucking company to distribute fresh produce and natural foods.

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 23, Issue 1, pages 60–88. ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480. (electronic). © 2019 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2019.23.1.60>.

These enterprises were subsidiaries of the Brotherhood of the Sun, a new religious movement and intentional living commune begun in 1969 in Santa Barbara, California, by Norman Paulsen (1929–2006) and his followers.² During the 1970s, the Brotherhood of the Sun attracted youths who wanted to live close to the land and who found in Paulsen a charismatic, empowering spiritual teacher. At its height, over 340 people lived on the commune. They farmed gardens and crops, reared livestock, fished from their schooners, made clothing and crafts, constructed buildings, and experimented with alternative energy sources. They distributed food and natural dry goods to restaurants and health food stores across California and nationally, making millions of dollars. At Sunburst's farms and food businesses, people lived sustainably, worked industriously, and produced enough goods and profits to finance their commune. Growing an organic foods empire allowed members to share their ethos of natural, conscious living and spiritual awareness. These twin aims, of spiritual development and organic food, worked hand in hand.

Despite their size and longevity, the Brotherhood of the Sun and Sunburst Farms are largely missing from studies of organic farming and diets, counterculture communes, and new religious movements. Histories of American organic food production and consumption typically emphasize secular progenitors and cultural trends while minimizing religious figures and groups.³ Well-known scholarly works, such as those by Warren J. Belasco and Harvey Levenstein, neglect spiritual diet and health reformers of the 1960s and 1970s, emphasizing instead secular countercultural environmentalism as the basis for the emerging trend toward natural foods.⁴ Belasco argues that the “countercuisine” arose from demands for anti-consumerist, anti-industrial, environmentally friendly, healthy, therapeutic, and organic foods, which he sees as connected to the early ecology movement. Despite using the phrase “New Age” and citing *New Age Journal*, Belasco almost entirely ignores spiritual groups espousing the organic ideal. Belasco also claims that health food stores grew from holistic living, which emphasized simplicity and nature, rural environments and non-Western ideas, and intentional or “conscious” eating and food preparation—impulses that he disconnects from spiritual catalysts. Similarly, Julie Guthman's study of organic farming in California identified “four broad concerns animating the organics movement: the alienating nature of industrial production, the health effects of processed foods, the social justice concerns endemic to the counterculture, and the environmental impact of industrial pollutants.”⁵ In these narratives, secular reasons predominate over religious motives. While some works have rejected this framing—by highlighting spiritual contributions—most writers tell a secular story.⁶ Given California's seminal role in the organics movement, it is odd that its largest organic farm of the 1970s has been overlooked.⁷

Scholarship about the Brotherhood of the Sun is scant and almost entirely missing from works about communes of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ Garry W. Trompf is one of the few scholars to have written about it and the only one to devote more than a few pages to the group.⁹ Trompf describes Sunburst as a millenarian cargo cult, a framing based on Paulsen's teachings that The Builders, who established the utopian lost civilization of Mu (or Lemuria) and are really God's angels, departed from Earth after warfare entered human history and an asteroid hit Earth; these peaceful beings will return in spaceships to provide superior technology after a coming cataclysm and after humanity recovers spiritual wisdom and restores brotherhood on the planet through simple living.¹⁰ The Brotherhood of the Sun saw itself as a New Age Eden promoting Christ consciousness and as a beacon for The Builders to return. Trompf's analyses focus on Paulsen's mixture of Christianity, Theosophy, and Ufology, deemphasizing influences by Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), the Hopi, and the Essenes. However, no work to date has connected the group's religious beliefs to their primary daily activity of farming, distributing, selling, and eating organic foods. Given the Brotherhood of the Sun's significant membership and media coverage throughout the 1970s, and its longevity into the present, it is surprising that so few scholars of communes or new religious movements have paid attention to it.

This article helps rectify these omissions. I locate the Brotherhood of the Sun within the "co-evolution of health food and spirituality" and the "cosmic cookery trend."¹¹ Through archival research, interviews, and participant observation, I argue that managing Sunburst Farms is simultaneously an embodied spiritual practice and a pragmatic commercial enterprise.¹² The Brotherhood of the Sun's organic farms, farmers markets, and other health food businesses financed their communal utopia while also spreading their ideals of divine union and service to humankind through mindful food production and consumption. Sunburst's economic enterprises reflected their religious beliefs and spiritual practices of farming, preparing, selling, serving, and eating natural foods. Farming through natural means and as a meditative, communal labor connected members with each other and with Mother Earth as a material and spiritual being. Eating organic food, prepared mindfully, brought solar and cosmic vibrational energies into peoples' bodies, which members saw as temples for the divine spirit. Selling organic, wholesome foods encouraged openness to spiritually conscious living in harmony with nature, served as a potential recruitment method, and helped Sunburst achieve fiscal and environmental sustainability. These techniques linked personal spiritual growth with growing organic foods and with generating income through health food companies. In these shared endeavors, the organic, cosmic, and economic cannot easily be disentangled.

**NORMAN PAULSEN'S DREAM-VISION: WORLD
BROTHERHOOD COLONIES, SPIRITUAL SEEKING,
AND NATURAL FOODS**

Norman Paulsen was born and raised in the central coast of California. His father, Charles Paulsen (d.1970), was a judge and Buddhist minister in Lompoc and San Luis Obispo.¹³ As a child, Norman had visions of illumined beings who visited to give him guidance or teach him skills. Years later, he would recognize these figures as Yogananda, Melchizedek, and Christ. In 1947, after reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), Paulsen entered Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in Los Angeles to study at the Mount Washington monastery and be initiated as a monk. There, he studied Kriya Yoga, a meditation technique for obtaining self-realization and cosmic unity through directing mental energy along the spinal chakras. He also read widely about various religions. Paulsen would later incorporate teachings from Buddhism, Hinduism, Hopi and other Native American traditions, the Judaism of the Essenes, mystical Christianity, Theosophy, and Ufology. At SRF, he learned construction and carpentry, gardening, and in 1951 helped build one of the first vegetarian restaurants in California, SRF's India House Café. Fellow students of Yogananda included his friends Bernard Cole (c.1922–c.1980), who as Yogacharya Bernard became an independent spiritual teacher, and J. Donald Walters (1926–2013), better known as Swami Kriyananda, founder of the Ananda Cooperative Communities.¹⁴

While at SRF, Paulsen had a “dream-vision” where he saw “young people in the mountains” and the “Santa Barbara landscape.”¹⁵ He later wrote that this dream would fulfill “Yogananda’s vision of self-sustaining world brotherhood colonies where men, women, and children could live harmoniously together practicing plain living and high thinking” and thus achieve union with the divine.¹⁶ For Yogananda, who first wrote about them in 1932, world brotherhood colonies could cure society of the root causes of depression, namely selfishness and consumerism.¹⁷ In order to achieve a “practical Utopia,” Yogananda argued that political revolutions “must be carried on by spiritual methods.” These “little-group models of ideal civilizations must be started in every community for happy and peaceful living, with much meditation and much chivalry shown. These groups should be well balanced, financially secure, and they should exist always in high thinking and plain living.”¹⁸ They should also, he pointed out, grow their own food on community-owned farms. Yogananda elaborated:

Each spiritual colony should take the vow of plain living and high thinking, the brotherhood of man, fellowship of all religions, renunciation of luxury, and the joint ownership of lands, transportation, education, food,

and money, and they should eat and dress in the community way, but spiritually each soul in the community must be unencumbered so that he may develop and advance as deeply as he can.¹⁹

These colonies combined personal spiritual development, humble communal living, and collective financial security, as the Brotherhood of the Sun would go on to do. This “spiritual farm” model would inspire Paulsen and Walters to found world brotherhood colonies of their own.²⁰ In 1951, when Paulsen was 21, he was pronounced a “minister” of the SRF.²¹ However, later that same year, after a disagreement with Yogananda over maintaining chastity and the departure of a close friend, Paulsen left SRF.

Paulsen spent the ensuing years working as a tradesman and expanding his spiritual horizons. Soon after returning to Santa Barbara he had a direct encounter with what he variously called I AM THAT I AM, Christ, the Divine Solar Logos, or the Divine Mother and Father. He saw a vision of a Golden Age of human beings living in cosmic consciousness, recognizing them as sons and daughters of God. In 1952, inspired by the publication of *I Rode a Flying Saucer*, Paulsen met its author, famed UFO contactee George W. Van Tassel, and joined Van Tassel’s UFO study group.²² Paulsen married and later divorced Van Tassel’s daughter Glenda, had a son with her, and became an expert mason and novice electrician.²³ Throughout the 1950s, he continued to have visions, especially of visiting beings of light, whom he would later interpret as Christ and Melchizedek as well as enlightened beings he understood to be Lemurian space travelers or cosmic angels that he called the Ancients or, alternately, The Builders. The beings told Paulsen that 500,000 years ago they came to earth to establish an ideal civilization. Eventually, war with an invading intergalactic malignant force caused them to leave. One day they will return, they told him, and Paulsen’s job was to help prepare the way. The early 1960s was a period of injury, illness, and poverty for Paulsen, including his being involuntarily committed to a state mental institution and having a near-death experience. But in 1964, after leaving the psychiatric hospital, The Builders instructed him to gather a community ready for them as a base station. Much later, Paulsen wrote that he was an ancient ruler of Mu who flew a spaceship on the side of Christ and that he would head the return of the Ancients when they arrive to establish “God’s Empire of the Sun.”²⁴

By the late 1960s, living in Santa Barbara, Paulsen taught meditation and led spirituality discussion groups at his home. He attracted youths seeking mystical experiences and “rehabilitation from a whole wasted middle-class existence,” as he termed it.²⁵ Many young people were caught in a life of alcohol, drugs, and despair, he claimed. Through teaching them his eclectic spirituality they were empowered with a deeper purpose. In 1969, Paulsen and his followers formed the Brotherhood of the Sun, the name reflecting their vision of the Spiritual Sun—the light of



Photo 1: *Norman Paulsen at the front gate of Sunburst Farm, 1972. Courtesy of Mehosh Dziadzio.*

the Creator, communion with which is the highest goal of the Brotherhood's members—as well as a homophone of Jesus as the Son of God. That same year, he moved from his trailer home to a house that could accommodate his growing flock, mainly local college students. People who visited were fed “good natural food that we took turns preparing.” Soon the group needed more space and began meeting in an old ice cream factory. They supported themselves through construction jobs, housecleaning, and babysitting, but they decided they “would rather grow good food and sell it to the public” as their means of support. Like many Americans, Paulsen's followers chafed at conformist demands in society and saw rural living as a path to salvation. “We realized that we all wanted to have a place in the country where we could grow our own food and live closer to the land,” Paulsen wrote.²⁶

Sunburst members told me that they felt drawn to Sunburst and to the relationship with Mother Earth that it cultivated. Patty Paulsen, Norman's last wife, who joined the Brotherhood of the Sun in 1975 and has been its spiritual director since his death in 2006, said: “It was a time of getting back to the land, back to Mother Earth.”²⁷ Valerie King, who joined in 1973, said that Yogananda “started this energy of, if you really want to deepen in spirit and grow in spirit then let your inner life unfold into your outer life and make that in harmony with the earth.” She continued: “We got the Industrial Revolution, we got a lot of conveniences and comforts, but we lost our connection with Mother Earth, and it felt like something important spiritually that we be able to

integrate that.”²⁸ Members shared a vision of escaping a consumerist society, living closer to the land, and growing spiritually in harmony with nature and with each other as they planted, tended, harvested, prepared, ate, and sold organic food.

Norman Paulsen and his followers would create a commune along the lines of Yogananda’s world brotherhood colonies and grow organic food. Timothy Miller argues that organic gardening was “widely practiced in the 1960s-era communes long before it received national attention” and that “most rural communes engaged in organic gardening.”²⁹ Like these other communes, Sunburst embraced new farming techniques that reduced waste, improved soil and plant quality, and eliminated unnatural or synthetic products, including by composting, companion planting, and treating the soil as a “living organism.”³⁰ Within a few years, Sunburst helped shape the organics movement in California and, in so doing, planted seeds for what it called spiritual growth and planetary awakening.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SUN AND SUNBURST FARMS

Sunburst Farms began in 1970 when Paulsen bought a 160-acre farm near Santa Barbara, calling it Sunburst Farm. For Paulsen, the farm “is and always has been a place of The Spirit.”³¹ He described having visitations from The Builders or Ancient Ones who blessed his project. In 1971, Sunburst bought a 220-acre farm which they renamed Lemuria Ranch. As in Paulsen’s dream-vision at SRF, these farms lay along the Santa Ynez Mountains in Santa Barbara. The Brotherhood of the Sun incorporated as a religious nonprofit in 1971 as Sunburst Communities and created Sunburst Natural Foods as its member-run for-profit corporation to manage their health food businesses. That same year they opened Sunburst Community Store to sell their organic produce, and soon formed a trucking company, also called Sunburst Natural Foods, to distribute organic food and natural dry goods. The company became “one of the largest distributors of naturally grown foods in the United States,” trucking their own foods and those grown by other organic farms.³² They delivered produce to other natural foods popularizers, such as The Source Restaurant in Los Angeles, Mrs. Gooch’s Natural Food Markets in southern California, the pioneering San Francisco organic food co-op Veritable Vegetable, and the natural foods distributor Mountain People’s Warehouse, as well as to stores and restaurants across America. Sunburst opened two local restaurants, a whole-grain bakery, a dairy, and a fruit juice-bottling company, among other enterprises, and bought a 2,000-acre farm. Paulsen hired lawyers, accountants, and investment staff to maximize profits in a commercial entity, the Brotherhood of Man, so that they could reinvest monies within the

commune and in their farm properties. Sunburst marketed their products as healthier, more environmentally sustainable, and more spiritually nourishing than industrially processed or chemically-grown non-organic foods.

Sunburst's success enabled it to enlarge its utopian community and its agricultural operations while developing "one of the pioneering companies in the natural foods/organic produce industry."³³ A 1974 booklet for the group stated, "In our markets we sell organically grown food from our farms and other organic farms, alongside commercial food. We try to provide the consumer with food grown in a natural way, in harmony with mother nature." The group farmed without poisonous pesticides or artificial fertilizers and made their own compost. Commune members largely worked without pay, yet they received nutritious food, simple clothing, medical care, shared land, and housing. Working for Sunburst companies provided members "a way . . . to expose as many people as possible to our way of life as well as offer them the goods and services we are able to share."³⁴ Sunburst also employed over 150 people across California who were not members, but who "expressed interest in Sunburst and are in sympathy with our goals. We, in turn, are trying to offer people good employment in a growing food industry with a spiritual backbone."³⁵ Its businesses were not only strategies for economic survival and growth, but also practical means for sharing spiritual values of cosmic communion and plain living with potential new members.

As its organic food businesses grew, it helped create standards for the emerging organics industry. Sunburst helped develop some of the first American organic certification and advocacy groups, including California Organic Growers, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), and the Western Organic Food Foundation, contributing funds and leadership on organizational boards and earning organic certification itself.³⁶ Helmut Klauer managed Sunburst's organic agriculture production and distribution, and helped found the CCOF in 1973 as secretary of the organizing committee.³⁷ Sunburst initiated a lab testing program and followed Oregon Tilth's organic food certification system to verify its produce's organic authenticity.³⁸ In 1974, one of the first issues of the *California Certified Organic Farmer Newspaper* included an article about Sunburst Farms, claiming that Sunburst "takes an active role in helping other farmers and consumers to learn about a natural way of life."³⁹ Early organic food distributor and CCOF pioneer Amigo Bob Cantisano had a "strong affinity" with Sunburst and Klauer, as did Michael Funk, another important natural foods distributor, who "looked to it as a model."⁴⁰ Sunburst inspired other organics pioneers, including Peter Roy, Doug Greene, and Barclay Hope.⁴¹ Despite the extra labor required, Sunburst declared "we are dedicated to organic farming."⁴² These standards set norms for organic farming techniques that

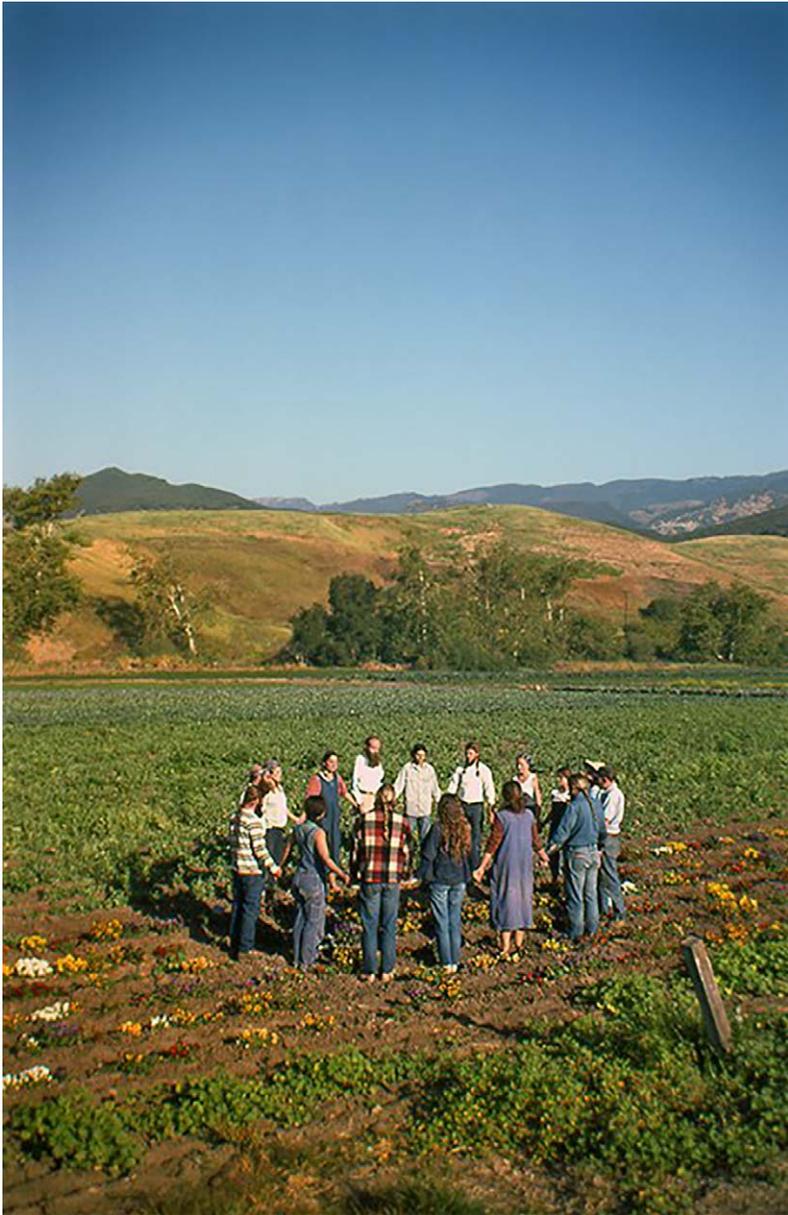


Photo 2: *Group prayer before setting out to work in the fields at Tajiguas Ranch, 1978.
Courtesy of Mehosh Dziadzio.*

preserved the ideals of a growing niche market and, for Sunburst members, facilitated a whole foods revolution of mindful eating and earth stewardship as spiritual practices.

Sunburst's operations diversified and expanded in the late 1970s as it became America's leading grower and retailer of organic foods. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* reported on the success of the movement, which totaled over 340 members and earned over \$3 million in profits in 1975.⁴³ The year prior, Paulsen had stepped down from the day-to-day management of Sunburst's businesses to focus on spiritual counseling for the community, letting other Sunburst elders run their ventures. In 1976, Sunburst bought a 3,000-acre farm called Tajiguas Ranch. In addition to growing fruit trees, vegetables, wheat, nuts, and other crops, members raised naturally fed, hormone-free goats, sheep, cows, and chickens. They made wool clothes and an array of dairy products, including butter, yogurt, cheese, milk, and smoothies. CCOF-certified Sunburst Organic Apple Juice sold well nationally. Their bees produced tons of honey. Paulsen bought horses to pull plows and to show competitively. The farms included machinery and tools for making furniture, pottery, bricks, blacksmithing, welding, and necessary items for the community and for use or sale in their businesses. A gift shop above one restaurant sold items crafted by Sunburst members. Paulsen bought four large sailboats—the group owned just one at any given time—to catch fish for their Sunburst Pierce Fisheries and for pleasure cruises. In 1978, Sunburst opened a large alternative supermarket, selling their own organic foods, organic produce from other farms, and other products. It pioneered selling bulk items in clear, airtight food bins. Sunburst distributed produce from other organic farmers throughout California and the Southwest as well as to Chicago, New York, Canada, and other major markets by truck and air freight. By 1980, Sunburst earned \$16 million through twelve wholesale and retail outlets in five cities. From a small spiritual farming commune, Sunburst had become a “capitalist success story.”⁴⁴

Sunburst member Susan Duquette's *Sunburst Farm Family Cookbook* (1976) sold well in two editions and promoted the group's dietary and spiritual goals.⁴⁵ Based on recipes from the community and their restaurant, *The Farmer and the Fisherman*, the cookbook introduced readers to homemade pescatarian dishes. Recipes included instructions for making whole grain breads and cereals, vegetarian fare, fish plates, bean and pasta dishes, soups, salads, dairy products, teas, juices, and desserts. Duquette claimed, “Nutritionally, home-grown organic foods are best, especially when brought to your table right after picking.” She also told readers, “In order to help support ourselves and to share with other people our way of life, we have established a large organic foods complex.”⁴⁶ Explaining Sunburst's spiritual way of life, the introduction stated:

Our dream is to provide a home in natural surroundings for people who long to live a simple, virtuous life full of love and service to each other and to all mankind. We hope that through our efforts and



Photo 3: *A Sunburst member holds a bottle of Sunburst’s organic apple juice produced from its orchards. Courtesy of Mehosh Dziadzio.*

example we may help to bring the Garden of Eden back to this, our Mother Earth, and to see all men live in brotherhood under the Fatherhood of God.⁴⁷

Duquette links simple living, charity, and harmony with the Edenic utopianism found at Sunburst. The first of the cookbook’s “Eight Paths of Right Cooking” instructed readers to “begin with a short moment of meditation.”⁴⁸ Through mindful cooking with organic foods, readers could tap into Sunburst’s vision. This book, pamphlets published by Sunburst, Sunburst stores and products, and word of mouth spread news about Sunburst’s health food ethic and communal living as both embodied spiritual pursuits and a thriving organics business.

For members, cultivating and consuming organic foods, conscious living, and self-sufficiency converged with and were outgrowths of their spiritual aim of divine communion. Paulsen taught that living the eightfold path and twelve virtues would lead members to cosmic consciousness. The eightfold path included meditation, conduct, study, speech, association, nourishment, work, and recreation. The twelve virtues were charity, faith, loyalty, patience, honesty, perseverance, temperance, humility, courage, equanimity, continence, and compassion. Through these, people could achieve the goal of Sunburst: to “meet the Living

God face to face, and bring others to this meeting place.”⁴⁹ In his book *Sacred Science* (2000), Paulsen elaborated that nourishment—one of the eightfold path—is essential for God-realization. Because the “body is a temple for Divine Spirit,” adepts eat and drink “pure wholesome foods,” preferably grown themselves or purchased from “organic growers.” Paulsen wrote, “The ancient adepts all said that right nourishment comes from your own planting if it is possible for you: the placing of seeds in the soil of Mother Earth with your own hands, then the watering with love and the harvesting.” Paulsen counseled that adepts should “[s]tay mindful in preparing food” because “[e]verything a person touches retains that person’s energy imprint . . . vibrationally.”⁵⁰ Growing and eating healthy food is spiritually fruitful, he taught, and provides greater nutritional value. Paulsen also recommended juicing to conquer disease. As a charitable service, Sunburst provided food for local people in need.⁵¹

Farm labor was a spiritual practice at Sunburst. Paulsen told a reporter, “We approve of both idealism and meditation; we use them. But we know they’re not enough. . . . You’ve also got to get out there and put your back into it, get your hands dirty and calloused.”⁵² Yet, when farm work is performed with joy and a willingness to learn “it ceases to be work and becomes a meditation,” one brochure said.⁵³ “Work is the purpose for which we were fashioned, that our bodies, minds and spirits might be instruments through which Divine Spirit is expressed.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Stephen Gaskin of The Farm “preached the need to spiritualize labor, to ‘make *work* a meditation.’”⁵⁵ This embodied spirituality centered Sunburst. Members woke up early for daily meditation, then ate together, then worked at farming, trucking, selling, and baking; evenings were spent in communal dinners, small group meditations, and social time. Dusk and Willow Weaver, members from 1978–1982, wrote, “[A]ccomplishments at Sunburst, both physical and spiritual, will bring deeper growth to each member and will demonstrate more to others if they are orchestrated by an entire people.”⁵⁶ Individuals could meditate and work individually, but communal effort heightened the spiritual depth of these labors, leading to oneness with the divine, Mother Earth, and each other. “For the member of Sunburst all physical endeavors are natural outgrowths of this divine plan,” they continued; “The community draws a direct, though not exclusive, line between attunement with nature and attainment of communion with the Creator. In other words, simple living helps.”⁵⁷ This ethic attracted new recruits. A community newsletter said, “Growing good, wholesome food that glows with life force, picking it, washing it, and then sending it to our stores and across the nation, clearly demonstrates how we are touching the people of this world with our fruits.”⁵⁸ Paulsen echoed, “People who want their lives changed will be attracted to us by our fruits,” material and spiritual.⁵⁹

Sunburst members lived by formal rule structures initially, but later gravitated toward community guidelines, allowing independence within spiritual belonging. Healthy living norms included no drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or premarital or extramarital sex; wearing simple clothes; living outdoors cleanly and naturally; and eating a nutritious, organic diet, preferably vegetarian. Meals were mostly fresh dairy products, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, and grains. Fish or meat was served several times a week by the late 1970s, although originally the diet was exclusively raw food, then lacto-ovo vegetarian, then choose-your-own. As with food, so with spirituality: Sunburst member Richard Longstreet told scholar Timothy Miller that people at Sunburst were doing a “sort of ‘religion of the month’ for a long time,” leaning about and practicing different religions.⁶⁰ Sunburst did not require members to share Paulsen’s unique vision, although many did. Its ethics and success inspired others who linked farming, community, sustainability, and spirituality. Cesar Chavez told executive board members of the United Farm Workers at their La Paz headquarters that he admired Sunburst, viewing it alongside Synanon as possible models for cooperative ventures in socially just communal living that cultivated food and spirituality.⁶¹

For Paulsen, the farms and ranches were holy places, sites approved of by his visionary companions, the Angel Man and Woman and The Builders. Paulsen wrote, “The Builders are here to illuminate all of humanity and destroy the makers of war forever, but we have to help. Sunburst is a base station for The Builders. . . . The Builders hope to create an image through Sunburst that would show how the Ancients lived in brotherhood before.”⁶² Paulsen saw Sunburst as a “living demonstration” of Christian charity and complete self-realization.⁶³ His decision to start the farm was not just an expression of his desire for natural living and back-to-the-land ethos, but was also based on his cosmic vision of divine union achievable through organic farming. He professed:

The communities, the stores and the ship [schooner] are the manifested proof that my visions and contacts with The Builders are real. . . . Sunburst has become, not only a large and growing community of men, women and children, but a financially successful business enterprise designed to support ourselves. The by-product of living a life in harmony with The Spirit is to have physical abundance—a clean little house or cabin, good wholesome food, and homemade clothing done with love, plus lots of loving friends.⁶⁴

Paulsen connected his visions of Lemurian visitors and interplanetary harmony to communal living, organic farming, and natural foods at Sunburst Farms. But as Paulsen’s ideas regarding The Builders and his future role in their return intensified, ruptures emerged within the group.

While some disagreed with Paulsen's teachings about the "ancient, intergalactic spaceflight of divine emissaries in vehicles formed of light," many were shocked when Paulsen claimed to be Jesus come again who would restore the Garden of Eden.⁶⁵ Paulsen said he was Christ and rode in spaceships with The Builders as "one of the ancient rulers of Mu," an apotheosis that climaxed as Paulsen wrote his autobiography, *Sunburst: Return of the Ancients* (1980), later retitled *Christ Consciousness* (1984).⁶⁶ At Sunburst, he saw himself as a gnostic guide and savior during a key turning point in cosmic history. While many members believed that Paulsen had cosmic powers and insights, and that a "living, conscious, divine Spirit" manifested itself in every person since the time of the "Mother-Father Creators," others found Paulsen's new teachings difficult to believe, especially given his erratic behavior described below.⁶⁷ Dusk and Willow Weaver wrote that at least one top member left, in part, because he found Paulsen's celestial beliefs "intolerably incredible."⁶⁸ Michael Abelman, an ex-member and organic farming leader, said that he was expelled because he did not agree that Paulsen was Jesus returned.⁶⁹ Many others left voluntarily for the same reason.

By 1978 a confluence of factors—Paulsen's self-deification; concentration of power; financial self-dealing; and reported weapons arsenal, alcoholism, and drug habit—drove people from Sunburst. Accusations in 1975 that he had brandished guns in public, stockpiled firearms, and oversaw military training drills in preparation for a coming apocalypse resulted in defections and bad publicity.⁷⁰ As a result, Sunburst was investigated by anticult groups, leading to the kidnapping of two Sunburst members in 1976 by famed "deprogrammer" Ted Patrick. Later allegations that Paulsen abused painkillers, sexually abused minors, and evaded taxes, in addition to a threatened shoot-out with law enforcement after he was arrested for drunk driving and resisting arrest in 1978, led many members to publicly turn against him, and to increased scrutiny by federal law enforcement.⁷¹ In addition to these concerns, members alleged that Sunburst did not fairly distribute the wealth from its businesses. Workers and farmers demanded a greater share of profits, especially as they claimed Paulsen and his inner circle lived well while they lived in poverty.⁷² In 1980, store employees agitated for a union and filed a grievance alleging anti-union intimidation by Sunburst's management.⁷³ Increasing competition in the organic foods market whittled away at revenues by undercutting Sunburst's prices. By 1981, two-thirds of the membership had left, leaving the farm and markets with fewer workers. These economic and labor woes brought about Sunburst's financial downfall. A 1981 lawsuit by over 70 former members sought \$1.3 million of the group's profits; it was later dismissed. A separate lawsuit concerning Sunburst's inability to pay its debts caused Sunburst to have to sell its Tajiguas Ranch. Sunburst finished liquidating its California properties in 1982. These

issues led most people to depart. In turn, Sunburst's organics businesses and communal experiment began to collapse.

Still, many continued to follow Paulsen spiritually and spatially. In 1981–1982, Paulsen and about one hundred members left California for a half-million-acre cattle ranch in Wells, Nevada, and to a mobile home park in nearby Oasis, a small settlement where members operated a gas station, mini-mart, hotel, and restaurant. By 1983, after enduring harsh winters, short growing seasons, and facing a lien on the new ranch, Paulsen took most of the remnant to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he renamed them The Builders. This core group would go on to create a new chain of health food stores, organic farms, and a spiritual retreat sanctuary that sustains Sunburst today.

SUNBURST COMMUNITIES 1980s–PRESENT

Since 1981, Sunburst's businesses and spiritual community have grown and declined anew. They have drawn on many of the same teachings and adapted to new spiritual trends. The community continues to link growing organic food with spiritual growth, selling natural foods to inspire harmony with Mother Earth and spiritualizing food work as meditative practice. During the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, the community dwindled further, eventually down to a few dozen people. In Utah, they mostly abandoned farming to find other employment, living in a mansion and then in an apartment complex they managed. They stopped pooling resources collectively and began earning income individually. In Salt Lake City, they bought, remodeled, and sold houses; ran an excavation-demolition business; began offering weekend retreats for spiritual seekers; and opened two small natural foods stores they called New Frontiers, which helped introduce organics to Utah. Some members went to Arizona and opened additional New Frontiers stores—in Flagstaff, Sedona, and Prescott—between 1988–1995. The group opened more markets in Salt Lake City. Paulsen renamed the group Solar Logos in the mid-1980s, then returned to California in 1988, looking for land for a new commune. In 1991, Paulsen bought a 53-acre ranch near Buellton, California, called it Sunburst Farm, and relocated the group's headquarters there in 1992. He also bought a larger property called Nojoqui Farm (sometimes called New Frontiers Farm) to raise organic produce for their markets. In 1995–1996, most of the members moved back to the Santa Barbara area, built homes and a retreat center on the ranch, and once again called themselves Sunburst.

New Frontiers natural markets has been the primary income generator for the community since the 1990s and serves as a pathway for Sunburst's organic foods and spiritual values. It sells natural foods, homeopathic medicines, and sundry items. Jonathan King, who joined



Photo 4: *Sunburst Farmer's Market store in Santa Barbara, California, c.1970s.
Courtesy of Mehosh Dziadzio.*

Sunburst in 1974 and became head of business operations, “brought his spiritual practice into the business world” in managing New Frontiers.⁷⁴ Its website states, “We at New Frontiers have always been enthusiastic supporters of organic foods. It is our belief that growing and supporting organics is one of the best things we can do for ourselves, for our children, and for our earth.”⁷⁵ The stores provide “natural” foods for “healthy living” and they “desire to inspire personal growth and positive change.”⁷⁶ Yet, as the group relocated to California, operating the stores in other states became difficult. They sold the three Utah stores to Wild Oats, a natural foods grocery chain, in 1996, and opened two new stores in California the next year.⁷⁷ In the 1990s, Sunburst began hiring migrant workers as farm laborers since so few commune members remained.⁷⁸ In 2014, Sunburst sold a New Frontiers store in San Luis Obispo, California, and all three Arizona stores to Whole Foods, leaving only their store in Solvang, California.⁷⁹ In 2018, this last store expanded through renovation even as Sunburst had to sell its unprofitable Nojoqui Farm.

Today, Sunburst Sanctuary sits on Sunburst Farm, its only property. It is a center for spiritual retreats and regular Sunday services, offering meditation, original music, and organic, vegetarian brunches. Like many newer religions and communes, Sunburst faces difficulty in attracting new core members to replace the aging generation that founded the group. Where it once operated state-accredited schooling programs for its youth, today less than a handful of children participate in community life. Sunburst hopes to attract weekend participants and potential new

members through advertising its yoga and organic food practices, seeing these as popular avenues for outreach while staying true to their foundational teachings and praxes. Karma Yoga and permaculture retreats encourage would-be participants to work the soil, learn about holistic health, and find physical and spiritual rejuvenation. A few dozen members attend regularly on Sundays and consider themselves a part of the Sunburst community, while about twenty committed members live on the farm and practice Paulsen's teachings. In addition to family homes on the property, Sunburst also has a great lodge, a sanctuary, an office with gift shop, tiny bungalows around campfires for guests, and farm land. Sunburst sells books, CDs, and DVDs by Paulsen as well as works by Yogananda and community-made crafts. Its retreats, workshops, and gift shop, like its New Frontiers store, combine spiritual and economic goals.

In March 2018, I attended a three-day permaculture workshop called "Regenerating Earth and Spirit" designed to introduce people to permaculture and to Sunburst's spirituality, and to invite people to join the community.⁸⁰ Activities included restorative yoga, guided meditation, a "wheel of life" gathering, a drumming circle, and a tutorial on permaculture and sustainable gardening led by Sunburst member Sean Fennell. A pamphlet described permaculture at Sunburst as:

co-creating with Spirit a fertile environment, within and without, that cultivates spiritual growth and nurtures each seeker's direct experience of the Divine, helping them to realize who they truly [sic] are, and the power they have to create heaven on earth through spiritual practice, supportive community, and selfless service.⁸¹

Part of the workshop included a Native American woman describing how seeds express the energy put into them from the sun and from the people who help the plants grow; this energy is what we consume when we eat plants or animals, she explained. It is thus important to ensure a healthy natural environment and to garden mindfully so that we and the earth regenerate energy positively. Later, when we selected seeds to take home and planted them in containers filled with organic soil, Fennell played raga music. He said that nature enjoys pleasing sound vibrations and that by playing ragas the plants would eventually express this harmony into us when we eat them as a conscious dining meditation. These teachings reflected Paulsen's statements about people imprinting energy onto everything they touch, including food, which is why mindful growing, preparation, and eating is necessary for proper spiritual development. The workshop promotes spiritual self-realization and environmental sustainability within the Sunburst community and for visiting attendees. It also provides income for the group and welcomes possible new members, as indeed several guests told me they would like to return for a future retreat or regular meditations.

While much smaller today, Sunburst's mission remains similar: "Sunburst is dedicated to personal and planetary awakening through spiritual practice, conscious living and sustainable Earth stewardship."⁸² It is "a global community of light workers, as well as an intentional cooperative community" whose purpose is to "facilitate spiritual education and support," including through "exploring, implementing and sharing principles of regenerative Earth stewardship through permaculture and organic farming."⁸³ Sunburst's webpage about "Earth Stewardship" states:

An essential part of Sunburst's teachings is learning to become true caretakers of our beautiful home planet—living close to Mother Earth, reaping her harvest in ways that replenish and regenerate the miracle of life. As souls awaken to Spirit, often the first step on the path is to seek wholesome foods to nourish the body, recognizing it as a temple for the Divine.⁸⁴

The webpage explicitly links earth care with spirituality and organics. It also connects Sunburst's history of organic farming and natural foods enterprises with its current commitment to organic permaculture and serving the local community through healthy nourishment and permaculture education. Sunburst's economic enterprises and religious beliefs merge in their spiritual practice of farming, preparing, selling, serving, and eating organic foods. This commingling of commerce and spirituality, of seemingly dichotomous secular and sacred arenas, is common in new religious movements—and in religious groups generally. Commercial enterprises offer religious groups an important means of financial support that sustain communities so that they can continue their spiritual missions. For new religions, food businesses are a ready way to generate capital, recruit members, enact spiritual beliefs, and share embodied spiritual practices.

COMMERCIAL AND SPIRITUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NEW RELIGIONS

New religious movements have long supported themselves through foods businesses and farms. As in earlier eras, many new religious movements of the 1960s and 1970s founded communes on ranches or large properties where members could farm, raise livestock, build housing, and escape modern urban life. Still, to sustain themselves financially and promote their novel spiritualities, these groups also often operated restaurants, food co-ops, natural foods stores, pizzerias, bakeries, or other commercial enterprises. Groups such as the One World Family, Brotherhood of the Spirit, 3HO/Sikh Dharma, The Source Family, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Rajneeshpuram, and

The Farm embraced these opportunities. Many of their businesses served to build relationships with local communities and offered opportunities for new members to join. To reduce costs and avoid fossil fuels, most also experimented with environmentally friendly energy sources such as solar and wind power. Members of these groups produced vegetarian and health food cookbooks. These strategies proved successful for movement growth and financial security, aligning spiritual beliefs with fiscal acumen in a wider capitalist economy. Farms and food businesses help new religious movements sustain their bodies, spirits, and coffers.

The Brotherhood of the Sun and Sunburst Farms blur the boundaries between spiritual and secular, religion and commerce. Paulsen and his followers were spiritual entrepreneurs as much as restaurateurs or business owners. James T. Richardson contends that new religious movements employ a variety of ways to finance their fledgling communities, including solicitation, small business ventures such as restaurants and manual labor companies, and contributions from members who work outside jobs.⁸⁵ Sunburst utilized Richardson's latter two methods to grow capital and spread its message. Sunburst wed New Age spirituality with corporate profitability. Ryan Edgington observed of 1960s and 1970s communal movements that "rather than abandon modern American society, maintaining a long-term back-to-the-land existence required establishing equilibrium between profitable external ventures and the collective ideals of the community."⁸⁶ Sunburst members were pragmatic about earning income in line with their spiritual beliefs. The community participated in local and national economic markets even as they retreated into rural religious communalism. Sunburst blended the romantic, utopian appeal of communal farm living with a highly organized, multimillion-dollar corporate firm.

There are practical reasons why new religious movements have tended to serve health food. In a perceptive article about the spiritual roots of the health food movement, Daniel Fromson claims that new religious groups "helped invent" health food and that "smaller groups usually have to generate revenue through actual businesses—and the restaurant industry has low barriers to entry." Fromson further asserts that "uncontroversial businesses like restaurants also help spiritual groups avoid persecution" as well as helping them "attract new members . . . indirectly, initially seeking to interest people not in membership but in obtaining goods or services."⁸⁷ Similarly, Marion Goldman argues that contemporary "new religious movements own and manage a number of restaurants and food businesses" for the purposes of "bringing in money, spreading their group's beliefs about food, and demonstrating their members' likeable personal qualities."⁸⁸ Sunburst's food businesses served these ends, promoting healthy food alongside spiritual ideals and communal living. In studying new Christian groups at the turn of the twentieth century, Laura J. Miller also contends that "proselytizing

through food” reminded members that “the business was an expression of a communal endeavor, and it presented consumers with a visible invitation to discover more about the spiritual ideals motivating the group.”⁸⁹ Miller adds that “restaurants were the ventures undertaken most frequently by religious groups.”⁹⁰ Sunburst fits into a pattern of new religions starting health food businesses.

Sunburst materials consistently connect counterculture with conscious capitalism. “Our farms, stores and workplaces give us the opportunity to not only support ourselves, but also to demonstrate our principles to all others with whom we come in contact,” one brochure said.⁹¹ This strategy proved successful. Paulsen said that people “learn about us primarily through our markets, our restaurant, our wholesale food distribution, or through other people familiar with the group.”⁹² “Each store became a vortex of healing energy that was rooted in virtue. This could be felt by our customers, as well as those who worked there,” Paulsen later wrote.⁹³ Another brochure stated that Sunburst’s goals included growing “good, natural food,” encountering “the Living Spirit,” and providing economic opportunity in Sunburst’s businesses, through which “members of Sunburst can grow materially as well as spiritually.”⁹⁴ Sunburst stores were not only “a place of right work for ourselves,” but also “a service to others” in both inspiring brotherhood and “providing wholesome, natural grown foods in the interest of healthy living.”⁹⁵ Paulsen told a journalist, “We’ve generated a way of life that’ll give us the money to manifest the things we want to manifest, which are places like this, dedicated to preserve Mother Earth, to the spiritual and mental growth of those who wish to participate, and to encourage others to do likewise.”⁹⁶ Religion and economy are intimately intertwined at Sunburst and in other religious movements that operate food businesses as strategies for survival and missional labor.⁹⁷ For these groups, restaurants and farms feed the body and the soul, providing physical and spiritual nourishment for members and customers.

Sunburst participates in capitalist markets even as it undermines commodity logics. Ryan Edgington theorizes that the farms and food businesses of countercultural communes led not to more rural pastoralism, with people producing their own food, but rather to more consumptive capitalism in that people could buy wholesome, organic foods grown by others as a measure of a healthy body and environment. Sunburst members had hoped that with “successful businesses like ours, we could support many Sunburst communities across the planet, thus fulfilling the vision of world brotherhood colonies.”⁹⁸ However, as Edgington argued, Sunburst’s community has dwindled while organic food has become a multibillion-dollar industry. The growth of what Michael Pollan has termed the “organic-industrial complex” and corporate behemoths such as Whole Foods, now an Amazon subsidiary, testify

to Edgington's thesis.⁹⁹ Despite this critique, William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark claim that new religious movements' vegetarian and macrobiotic restaurants and natural foods stores sell not only food but also "offer unconventional hopes for spiritual, emotional, and physiological benefit."¹⁰⁰ These therapeutic benefits may aid in marketing organic commodities to certain consumers, but they also reflect desires for spiritual connection that customers express through buying organic food. A Sunburst newsletter described communal harvesting as having a "healing effect on the mind, body, and spirit" that spreads to people who consume their edible and spiritual fruits.¹⁰¹ At Sunburst stores, people buy local organic food while nurturing their mind-body-spirit holism. Sunburst's innovators demonstrate savvy business acumen as well as commitment to religious idealism, both informing each other.

Meredith McGuire argues that food preparation and eating are embodied spiritual practices. Critiquing the historical marginalization of embodied practices found in certain Protestant definitions of religion, in which "ritual practices surrounding food . . . no longer counted as 'religious,'" McGuire reclaims the spirituality of growing, preparing, serving, and eating food.¹⁰² For McGuire, taste, sweat, and physical labor can be religious rituals that are part of people's ordinary, lived religions. According to her interviewees, "gardening, especially organic gardening, [is] a spiritual practice," particularly when it is done with mindfulness.¹⁰³ This is the kind of spiritual practice Paulsen and his followers lived out at Sunburst. Their primary daily activity of producing, transporting, and serving organic foods was not only a pragmatic choice for financially sustaining their commune but also a spiritual practice for obtaining union with cosmic energies. Sunburst Farms—read here to include Sunburst's many organic farms and natural foods businesses—is both an embodied spiritual practice *and* a pragmatic commercial enterprise. For Sunburst and its members, organic food, economic activity, and spiritual practice are inseparable. Like many new religious movements, Sunburst integrates spiritual cultivation with food work, coupling the spirit of cosmic consciousness with the spirit of capitalism.

I would like to thank Catherine L. Albanese, Benjamin E. Zeller, Cody Hoesly, and the anonymous reviewers for Nova Religio for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to David Stiver and David Gartrell, special collections librarians at Graduate Theological Union and the University of California, Santa Barbara, respectively, for help in finding materials for my research. Mehosh Dziadio kindly granted permission to use his photos in this article; additional photos can be viewed via his Facebook page and website (<https://mehosh.com/>). Finally, I am grateful to Patty Paulsen and other members of Sunburst for their hospitality in showing me their community, welcoming me to participate and observe, answering my questions, and donating materials to the UCSB library, as well as to ex-members who also shared their stories about food, spirituality, and life at Sunburst.

ENDNOTES

¹ Russell Chandler, “Sun Shines Bright on Brotherhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1974; Miles Corwin, “20 Years Later, Some Followers of Guru Still Keep the Faith,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1989. An agricultural newspaper affirmed, “The Sunburst Farms Distributing Company, operating out of Los Angeles, services much of the national health food market.” Tom Valentine and Carole Spounias, “Those Abiding Questions,” *Acres, U.S.A.* 11, no. 10 (October 1981), 12.

² The Brotherhood of the Sun has had several names over time, including The Builders, Solar Logos, and Sunburst. During the 1970s, it was known both as Sunburst and as the Brotherhood of the Sun; today, the group uses the name Sunburst. Throughout this essay I use the names Sunburst and Brotherhood of the Sun interchangeably. Sunburst Farms, in the plural, refers to the several businesses operated by the group, while Sunburst Farm, in the singular, refers to a specific farm property. Additionally, some sources spell Norman Paulsen’s last name as Paulson; I spell his name Paulsen as he did in his autobiography.

³ Major recent works include: Robin O’Sullivan, *American Organic: A Cultural History of Farming, Gardening, Shopping, and Eating* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2015); Brian K. Obach, *Organic Struggle: The Movement for Sustainable Agriculture in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

⁴ Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵ Chad Lavin, *Eating Anxiety: The Perils of Food Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 95.

⁶ Those who recognize spiritual influences include: Suzanne Peters, “The Land in Trust: A Social History of the Organic Farming Movement” (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1979); Samuel Fromartz, *Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007); Dan McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy: Anthroposophy and the History and Future of Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Jonathan Kauffman, *Hippie Food: How Back-to-the-Landers, Longhairs, and Revolutionaries Changed the Way We Eat* (New York: William Morrow, 2018).

⁷ The Brotherhood of the Sun and Sunburst Farms are missing from histories of the California organics movement. See Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Irene Reti and Sarah Rabkin, eds., *Cultivating a Movement: An Oral History of Organic Farming & Sustainable Agriculture on California’s Central Coast* (Santa Cruz: University of California, Santa Cruz, 2012). One exception is Joe Dobrow’s *Natural Prophets: From Health Foods to Whole Foods—How the Pioneers of the Industry Changed the Way We Eat and Reshaped American Business* (New York: Rodale Books, 2014), which mentions Sunburst on a few pages, but which wrongly claims that Sunburst “never attracted more than a localized following” (104). The documentary *Evolution of Organic* includes photos of Sunburst taken by former member Mehosh Dziadzio (b.1949), as well as interview clips with

Michael Abelman, a former Sunburst member and organic farming leader, but fails to mention Sunburst at all. Mark Kitchell, *Evolution of Organic* (Reading, PA: Bullfrog Films, 2017), DVD.

⁸ Major surveys include Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); John Case and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, eds., *Co-ops, Communes, and Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Richard Fairfield, *The Modern Utopian: Alternative Communities of the '60s and '70s* (Port Townsend, WA: Process, 2010). A notable exception is Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

⁹ See especially Garry Trompf, "The Cargo and the Millennium on Both Sides of the Pacific," in *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements: Transoceanic Comparisons of New Religious Movements*, ed. G. W. Trompf (New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 35–94. In addition to other works by Trompf, see also Andreas Gruenschloss, "When We Enter into My Father's Spacecraft: Cargoistic Hopes and Millenarian Cosmologies in New Religious UFO Movements," in *Encyclopedic Sourcebook of UFO Religions*, ed. James. R. Lewis (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003), 17–42; J.-M. Schiff, *L'Age Cosmique aux U.S.A.* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), 59–75; Ina-Maria Greverus, *Neues Zeitalter oder Verkehrte Welt: Anthropologie als Kritik* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 141–145, 298–299. Trompf began researching the group in the 1970s; although he planned to write a book about the Brotherhood of the Sun, this project has not been completed.

¹⁰ Trompf, "Cargo and the Millennium," 36–44.

¹¹ Daniel Fromson, "Where Food Is God: How Fringe Religious Groups Helped Launch the Healthy Eating Movement," *Slate*, 1 July 2011, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2011/06/where_food_is_god.html.

¹² My research includes collecting books, pamphlets, sermons, photographs, DVDs, CDs, and other documentary evidence of the Brotherhood of the Sun and Sunburst Farms; examining local and national news articles; obtaining the group's FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act; interviewing current members and ex-members; visiting Sunburst's farms, natural foods store, and sanctuary; and participant observation at several Sunday meditations from 2015–2018 and at a weekend permaculture retreat in March 2018.

¹³ Charles Paulsen's last name has also been spelled "Paulson" in some accounts. Blind since birth, he was known as the "Blind Buddha." He ministered in the Buddhist Churches of America.

¹⁴ Yogacharya Bernard lived at Sunburst Farm for a while during the 1970s until his death. There is a photo of Bernard, Paulsen, and Walters together at Sunburst dated 1978. Norman Paulsen, *Sunburst: Return of the Ancients* (Goleta, CA: Sunburst Farms, 1980), 525. Walters founded Ananda Cooperative Village in northern California in 1967. Walters wrote about his time with Paulsen at SRF; for example, see J. Donald Walters, *The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi* (Nevada City, CA: Ananda, 1977).

¹⁵ Jan Hansen-Gates, "Growing Outdoors: The Brotherhood of the Sun," *Santa Barbara Magazine* 1, no. 3 (Winter 1975/1976): 64–71; quote p.67. See Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 177–178, 191.

¹⁶ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 485. Paulsen rewrote this book three times: *Christ Consciousness* (Salt Lake City: The Builders, 1984); *The Christ Consciousness: The Pure Self Within You* (Salt Lake City: The Builders, 1994); *Christ Consciousness: Emergence of the Pure Self Within* (Buellton, CA: Solar Logos Foundation, 2002). Recently, Paulsen's widow Patricia (Patty) Paulsen and other Sunburst leaders have revised the book posthumously as a "fifth edition" by including some new material updating the group's history; see Norman Paulsen, *Life-Love-God: Story of a Soul Traveler* (Buellton, CA: Sunburst, 2016).

¹⁷ Swami Yogananda, "How to Burn Out the Roots of Depression by Divine Methods," *East-West* 4, no. 6 (1932): 5–8. Yogananda described the SRF center in Encinitas as the model for "self-sustaining world brotherhood colonies" that included the "training of disciples" and "an extensive agricultural project" providing vegetables for residents. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 8th ed. (1946; Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 1959), 499 and 480. Paulsen called the Encinitas plan a "seed . . . that one day . . . would bear fruit" of God-realization at Sunburst. Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 178.

¹⁸ Yogananda, "How to Burn Out the Roots," 8.

¹⁹ Yogananda, "How to Burn Out the Roots," 8.

²⁰ Paulsen discusses Yogananda's world brotherhood colonies as connected to his vision of a Santa Barbara ranch filled with young people, later identified as Sunburst. Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 177–178, 183, 485. Paulsen claimed that Yogananda told him as they drove through Santa Barbara, "I have always wanted to see a center here." Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 161; see also 203.

²¹ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 171 and 187.

²² George W. Van Tassel, *I Rode a Flying Saucer* (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing, 1952).

²³ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, chapters 29–35. After his divorce from Glenda in 1957, Paulsen decided he would "live as simply as possible, eating only raw foods, fruits and vegetables" (322). He took up the same diet in 1968 after a period of poor health.

²⁴ Garry W. Trompf, "History and the End of Time in New Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63–79; quote p.68. See Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 432–444.

²⁵ Jon Nordheimer, "Coast Religious Sect's Life Is Tested by Prosperity," *New York Times*, 6 April 1975.

²⁶ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 483, 500, 485.

²⁷ Patty Paulsen, interview with the author, Sunburst Farm, 12 October 2015.

²⁸ Valerie King, interview with the author, Sunburst Farm, 12 October 2015.

²⁹ Miller, *60s Communes*, 139 and 158.

³⁰ "Sunburst Farms: Tajiguas Ranch," Box 55, "Sunburst Communities" folder, American Religions Collection, ARC Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

³¹ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 499.

³² Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 500. See also Chandler, "Sun Shines Bright"; Corwin, "20 Years Later"; Miller, *60s Communes*, 162; Melanie Arcudi and Pauline Meyer,

"The Brotherhood of the Sun, 1969–1985: A Memoir," *Communal Societies* 5 (1985): 82–88, esp. pg. 86.

³³ "Sunburst Responds to 'Abiding Questions,'" *Acres, U.S.A.* 12, no. 1 (January 1982), 5.

³⁴ "Brotherhood of the Sun" (booklet) (Brotherhood of the Sun: 1974), unpaginated [pg. 13], Box 2, Folder 5, "Brotherhood of the Sun (1974–1976)," Robert Hine Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³⁵ Norm Paulsen, "What Is Sunburst?" (newsprint brochure) (Sunburst: 1979), 1, Box 35, Folder 20, "Sunburst Communities," New Religious Movements Organizations: Vertical Files Collection, GTU 99-8-1, The Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

³⁶ The "eco-agriculture" newspaper *Acres, U.S.A.* published critiques of Sunburst's organic operations, claiming it used some chemical sprays on certain crops, sold some non-organic items in its stores, and was not sufficiently certified as organic. Sunburst defended its organic *bona fides*. See Valentine and Spounias, "Those Abiding Questions," 12, and their rebuttal to Sunburst's 1982 response in "Sunburst Responds."

³⁷ "Sunburst Responds," 5; "Classic Organic," *Inside the Santa Ynez Valley Magazine*, Autumn 2009, <http://www.insidesyv.com/classic-organic/>. Helmut Klauer told me that he was inspired by *Organic Farming and Gardening* magazine, published by Rodale Press, and that many Sunburst members had read Francis Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1971). Klauer also stated that Sunburst hired a retired farmer of truck crops to teach them how to grow large quantities of vegetables, with Klauer ensuring that their expansion retained organic farming principles. Personal email communication, 22 June 2018.

³⁸ Susan Leslie, "Sunburst Dedicated to Natural Foods," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 1979.

³⁹ "A Southern California Farm Story," *The California Certified Organic Farmer Newspaper*, Spring 1974, 7.

⁴⁰ Sarah Rabkin, "Amigo Bob Cantisano: Organic Farming Advisor, Founder, Ecological Farming Conference," *Cultivating a Movement: An Oral History Series on Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Farming on California's Central Coast* (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2010), 33, <https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt98z5t9df/qt98z5t9df.pdf>; Dobrow, *Natural Prophets*, 73. Amigo Bob Cantisano created We the People Natural Foods Cooperative in 1972, Peaceful Valley Farm Supply in 1976, and the first Ecological Farming Conference in 1981. Michael Funk founded Mountain People's Warehouse in 1976, which later became United Natural Foods, the largest publicly traded U.S. wholesaler of natural and organic products.

⁴¹ Peter Roy became president of Whole Foods. Doug Greene created the trade magazine *Natural Foods Merchandiser* in 1978 and founded the Natural Products Expo in 1981. Barclay Hope, founder of several organic food businesses, began his career as a driver and store manager for Sunburst. Sunburst has participated regularly at health food expos and metaphysical conventions since the 1970s.

⁴² Sunburst Farms, "Sunburst Farms: Pioneering a Vision for a New Age" (newsprint brochure) (Sunburst Farms Natural Foods: c.1978), 2, Box 35, Folder 20,

“Sunburst Communities,” New Religious Movements Organizations: Vertical Files Collection, GTU 99-8-1, The Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

⁴³ Chandler, “Sun Shines Bright”; Nordheimer, “Coast Religious Sect’s Life”; Joan Zyda, “Cult Profits from a Labor of Love,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 July 1976. By 1979, Sunburst grossed over \$10 million with profits of \$1 million.

⁴⁴ Charles Meade, “The Sun Sets on a Natural Foods Empire,” *Santa Barbara News & Review*, 25 June 1981.

⁴⁵ Susan Duquette, *Sunburst Farm Family Cookbook: Good Home Cookin’ the Natural Way* (Santa Barbara: Woodbridge Press, 1976).

⁴⁶ Duquette, *Sunburst Farm Family Cookbook*, 11, 5.

⁴⁷ Duquette, *Sunburst Farm Family Cookbook*, 5.

⁴⁸ Duquette, *Sunburst Farm Family Cookbook*, 292.

⁴⁹ Paulsen, “What Is Sunburst,” 2. See also Steve Allen, *Beloved Son: A Story of the Jesus Cults* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982), 179–184; Ralph C. Miller, “Sunburst Farms,” *Small Farmer’s Journal* 2, no. 2 (1978): 43–46; “The Spirit Known as The Brotherhood of the Sun,” *The New Age Dawn* no. 15 (c.1977): 1–5, 14–19.

⁵⁰ Norman Paulsen, *Sacred Science: Meditation, Transformation, Illumination* (Buellton, CA: Solar Logos Foundation, 2000), 83. An earlier Sunburst brochure said, “The food that we eat absorbs its life from the sun, the waters and the nutrients in the soil. It also absorbs the energies of those who plant, harvest and prepare it. For this reason we try to grow and prepare as much of our own food as possible.” Sunburst Communities, “Sunburst Communities” (newsprint brochure) (Goleta, CA: 1979), unpaginated [pg. 11], Box 35, Folder 20, “Sunburst Communities,” New Religious Movements Organizations: Vertical Files Collection, GTU 99-8-1, The Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California. Sunburst credits these vibrational food themes to Yogananda’s “Divine Magnetic Diet.” Sunburst, *Meditations on the Eightfold Path of Conscious Living* (booklet) (Buellton, CA: Sunburst, 2018), 19–20.

⁵¹ Hansen-Gates, “Growing Outdoors,” 66.

⁵² Zyda, “Cult Profits.”

⁵³ Sunburst Farms, “Sunburst Farms,” 7. Paulsen also wrote that “meditation is like plowing the field. We must plow the field and make ready for the seeding” so that people flower into cosmic consciousness. Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 202.

⁵⁴ Sunburst Communities, “Sunburst Communities” (newsprint brochure), unpaginated [pg. 6].

⁵⁵ David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 260. Italics in original.

⁵⁶ Dusk and Willow Weaver, *Sunburst: A People, a Path, a Purpose: The Story of the Most Provocative Communal Group in America Today* (San Diego: Avant Books, 1982), 10.

⁵⁷ Weaver, *Sunburst*, 10, 11.

⁵⁸ Dennis, “Field and Row Crop Report,” *Solar Winds* 1, no. 1 (Mar.–Apr. 1978), 8, Box 35, Folder 21, “Sunburst Communities,” New Religious Movements

Organizations: Vertical Files Collection, GTU 99-8-1, The Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

⁵⁹ Chandler, "Sun Shines Bright"; Paulsen paraphrases Matthew 7:15–21.

⁶⁰ Miller, *60s Communes*, 215.

⁶¹ Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 202–203.

⁶² Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 522; see also 447.

⁶³ Sunburst Communities, "Sunburst Communities" (newsprint brochure), unpaginated [pg. 21].

⁶⁴ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 520; on organic farming, see also 491.

⁶⁵ Weaver, *Sunburst*, 111.

⁶⁶ Paulsen, *Sunburst*, 522.

⁶⁷ Paulsen, "What Is Sunburst," 4; see also Corwin, "20 Years Later."

⁶⁸ Weaver, *Sunburst*, 111.

⁶⁹ Corwin, "20 Years Later."

⁷⁰ In March 1975, the *Santa Barbara News & Review* ran a series of articles about Sunburst's stockpiling weapons and possible financial improprieties. For more on discord within Sunburst circa 1975, see Nordheimer, "Coast Religious Sect's Life"; Ben Cass, "Brotherhood of the Sun," *Seed: Journal of Organic Living* 4, no. 9 (1975): 4–6; José Enrique Rodríguez Ibáñez, "Patología de la Countercultura: El caso de la 'Brotherhood of the Sun,'" *Triunfo* XXX, no. 665 (28 June 1975): 40–41; Trompf, "Cargo and the Millennium," 37–38, 50, 53.

⁷¹ Arcudi and Meyer, "The Brotherhood of the Sun," 86–87; Hattie Beresford, "The Way It Was: The Many Faces of Ogilvy Ranch," *Montecito Journal*, 5 July 2007; Russell Chandler, "Religious Groups Head for Hills . . . and Survival," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1981; Corwin, "20 Years Later"; Wayne King, "In California, the 'Private Societies' Flaunt Firepower," *New York Times*, 17 December 1980; Trompf, "Cargo and the Millennium," 56–57. While the history of Sunburst's near-total breakdown is certainly interesting and worthy of further investigation, it is beyond the scope of this article.

⁷² Corwin, "20 Years Later."

⁷³ Chris Miller, "Union Files Misconduct Charges," *Daily Nexus*, 29 May 1981. These issues highlight a problem raised by Marion Goldman concerning businesses run by new religious movements: fair compensation for labor. Marion S. Goldman, "Food, Faith and Fraud in Two New Religious Movements," in *Minority Religions and Fraud: In Good Faith*, ed. Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 135–151.

⁷⁴ "Staff," Sunburst, <http://sunburst.org/about/staff/>, accessed 14 May 2018.

⁷⁵ "About Us: The New Frontiers Story," New Frontiers, <https://newfrontiersmarket.com/about>, accessed 14 May 2018.

⁷⁶ "New Frontiers," New Frontiers, <https://newfrontiersmarket.com/>, accessed 14 May 2018.

⁷⁷ Allie Kay Spaulding, "There's a Lot of Life in 'Them Thar Hills,'" *Lompoc Record*, 12 October 2008.

⁷⁸ Personal email communication with Helmut Klauer, 22 June 2018.

⁷⁹ On a 2015 visit to New Frontiers Natural Marketplace in Solvang, California, shelves featured local organic produce, naturopathic vitamins, homeopathic remedies, macrobiotics, smudging sticks, therapeutic teas, and metaphysical and health food magazines. During a 2018 visit to the newly remodeled store, New Frontiers had added a kitchen to prepare fresh meals, their own branded line of vitamins, and a refrigerated case filled with probiotics as large as the case selling organic meats.

⁸⁰ An earlier version of this workshop, Sunburst's first, was held in 2015 and led by Warren Brush, a leading permaculture educator, designer, and advocate. Heiko Wirtz, head of property services at Sunburst, earned a permaculture design certificate in 2014.

⁸¹ "What Is Permaculture at Sunburst," part of "Regenerating Earth and Spirit" workshop materials, 9–11 March 2018. On file with the author.

⁸² "Sunburst," Sunburst, <http://sunburst.org/>, accessed 24 February 2015.

⁸³ "About Sunburst," Sunburst, <http://sunburst.org/about/>, accessed 14 May 2018. It also lists, as "Aims and Ideals": "To create inner and outer environments that encourage and cultivate Self-realization individually, collectively, and globally. . . . To recognize and study the sacredness of Mother Nature. To use the gifts of imagination and will to design regenerative solutions, and become true caretakers of the Earth-garden."

⁸⁴ "Earth Stewardship," Sunburst, <http://sunburst.org/earth-stewardship/>, accessed 14 May 2018.

⁸⁵ James T. Richardson, "Financing the New Religions: Comparative and Theoretical Considerations," *Journal for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 3 (1982): 255–268.

⁸⁶ Ryan Edgington, "'Be Receptive to the Good Earth': Health, Nature, and Labor in Countercultural Back-to-the-Land Settlements," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 3 (2008): 279–308; quote p.300.

⁸⁷ Fromson, "Where Food Is God."

⁸⁸ Goldman, "Food, Faith and Fraud," 135.

⁸⁹ Laura J. Miller, *Building Nature's Market: The Business and Politics of Natural Foods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 65, 68.

⁹⁰ Miller, *Building Nature's Market*, 67.

⁹¹ "Sunburst Communities" (mailer brochure), Box 35, Folder 20, "Sunburst Communities," New Religious Movements Organizations: Vertical Files Collection, GTU 99-8-1, The Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

⁹² Paulsen, "What Is Sunburst," 3.

⁹³ Paulsen, *Life-Love-God*, 339.

⁹⁴ Paulsen, "What Is Sunburst," 2.

⁹⁵ Sunburst Communities, "What Is Sunburst?" (newsprint brochure) (Sunburst: 1980), 8, Box 11, Folder 13, "Sunburst (Goleta) (1979–1982)," Robert Hine Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. A different recruitment pamphlet refers to Sunburst Organic Foods as both "businesses" that financially support the group and as "our churches; places of beauty where

our friends can come and obtain the good wholesome fruits of the earth in a spirit of brotherly love and thanksgiving.” “Sunburst New Age Communities” (c.1976), 4, Box 55, “Sunburst Communities” folder, American Religions Collection, ARC Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

⁹⁶ Karlin J. Lillington, “One Man’s Visions Create a New-Age Society,” *Daily Nexus*, 27 April 1979.

⁹⁷ Writing about the Esalen Institute, Jeffrey Kripal argues that “spiritual creativity, utopian individualism, and a certain economic entrepreneurship all become central features” of alternative religious movements, adding that one “wonders how else these alternative voices are supposed to make a living.” Jeffrey K. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 401–402.

⁹⁸ Jacob, [title unavailable], *Solar Winds* 1, no. 1 (Mar. –Apr. 1978), 11.

⁹⁹ Michael Pollan, “Naturally: How Organic Became a Marketing Niche and a Multi-billion Dollar Industry,” *New York Times Magazine*, 13 May 2001.

¹⁰⁰ William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Client and Audience Cults in America,” *Sociological Analysis* 41, no. 3 (1980): 199–214; quote p.203.

¹⁰¹ Dennis, “Field and Row Crop Report,” 8.

¹⁰² Meredith B. McGuire, “Why Bodies Matter: A Sociological Reflection on Spirituality and Materiality,” *Spiritus* 3, no. 1 (2003): 1–18; quote p.9.

¹⁰³ McGuire, “Why Bodies Matter,” 10.