

# Six Rules for Organizing a Grassroots Regeneration Revolution

February 27, 2020 by Ronnie Cummins, Organic Consumers Association ([www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org))

Over the past five decades, as a food, natural health and environmental campaigner, anti-war organizer, human rights activist and journalist, I've had the inspiring and at times depressing opportunity to work and travel across much of the world.

Perhaps the most important lesson I've learned through my work is that people respond best to a positive, solutions-oriented message. Gloom-and-doom thinking—the kind that offers no plausible solution—doesn't generally inspire people to get involved or take action.

That doesn't mean we should downplay the seriousness of our current situation. We face unprecedented life-or-death threats. We're up against formidable political, economic and cultural obstacles. We must continue to highlight and criticize, with passion, facts and concrete examples, the bad actors, practices and policies that have brought us to the brink of a global crisis.

That said, I believe that the main obstacle we must overcome, in the U.S. and worldwide, is that many (if not most) people are locked into disempowering situations that are causing them to suffer from a pervasive sense of hopelessness. It's not that they don't want to change. But unfortunately, most people don't really believe things *can* change.

I disagree. I believe we *can* shift the global conversation on food, farming, politics, health and climate from one of hopelessness to one of hope. I believe we can empower the grassroots to rise up and take action, both individually and collectively.

In my latest book, *Grassroots Rising: A Call to Action on Food, Farming, Climate and a Green New Deal*, I outline what I call “Rules for Regenerators,” a roadmap for positive change. I go into each rule in-depth in my book, but here are the basics.

See <https://www.organicconsumers.org/grassroots-rising>

## Rule 1: Search Out and Emphasize the Positive

In the face of global ecosystem collapse and widespread corporate and political corruption, we need to think in terms of this: The darkest hour is right before dawn. That means not losing sight of the fact that the dawn *is* coming—so we should focus on, and prepare for it.

Instead of dwelling on the negative, we must seek, highlight and promote positive trends and practices. On the contemporary scene, there are many signs of change and powerful countervailing trends to the degenerative status quo, not only in the U.S., but across the world.

We need to focus on these world-changing trends—not dwell on the gloom and doom.

## Rule 2: Link up with People's Primary Concerns and Connect the Dots

The world is full of different people, living in different situations, with differing perspectives, passions and priorities. That means we can't take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to problem-solving.

Instead, we must integrate our green justice and regeneration messages with the specific issues and concerns that are most important to grassroots constituencies. Then lay out, in everyday language, a strategy that helps people understand that

we can actually solve the problems they care about most, while solving a host of other pressing problems at the same time.

Only by starting from where people are at, and then connecting the dots, can we capture the attention and imagination of a critical mass of the global grassroots and get them started thinking about how they can participate in our new movement and new economy.

## Rule 3: Stop Organizing Around Limited Single Issues

Global campaigning and activism is plagued with single-issue thinking that routinely gives rise to divided movements and fractured constituencies.

To bring about true regeneration, or even to pass sweeping new regenerative legislation like the Green New Deal, we

must not be divided and fractured, but united, inclusive and holistic in our understanding of the global crisis we face, and in our approach to problem-solving. [www.organicconsumers.org/essays/why-we-endorse-greennewdeal-and-how-we-plan-support-it](http://www.organicconsumers.org/essays/why-we-endorse-greennewdeal-and-how-we-plan-support-it)

Too often we hear that “My issue is more important than your issue,” or “My constituency or community is more oppressed than yours,” or “My solution is the only solution.”

That type of thinking won’t get us anywhere. Our global Regeneration Movement must be built on the principle that *all*

grassroots issues and *all* constituencies are important. We have to help each other recognize that the burning issues bearing down on the global body politic—climate change, poverty, unemployment, declining health, political corruption, corporate control, war and more—are the interrelated symptoms of the diseased system of degeneration.

## Rule 4: Stop Pretending that Partial Solutions or Reforms Will Bring About System Change

Activists often fall into the trap of malpractice when they project partial solutions or tactics as if they are systemic solutions. One of the most alarming examples of this is the notion that 100-percent renewable energy will, in and of itself, solve the climate crisis.

This theory is both misleadingly hopeful and dangerously flawed. Renewable energy will not get us to net-zero emissions by 2030 or even 2050 unless it is accompanied by a massive drawdown (of 250-plus billion tons) of excess carbon from the atmosphere through regenerative food, farming, land use and commerce.

Both of these things—renewable energy and carbon drawdown—need to be carried out simultaneously over the next 20 years.

Similarly naive, narrow-minded thinking might lead us to believe that campaign finance reform, or the election of this or that candidate, will solve the national and international crisis of elite domination and political corruption—or that in general, change in one community or country can solve what are essentially national and global problems.

Unless we can lift our heads, connect the dots and fight for unifying systemic changes, any changes that we do make won’t be sufficiently effective.

## Rule 5: Act and Organize Locally, but Cultivate a Global Vision and Solidarity

If civilization is to survive, we need to rebuild healthy, organic and relocalized systems of food and farming, and repair and restore our local environments.

To do this will require regenerators to put a priority on local and regional education, action and mobilization, in our personal lives and households, as well as in the marketplace and the political arena.

At the same time, we have to inject or integrate a national and global perspective into our local grassroots work and community building. The battle against severe climate

change, environmental destruction, deteriorating public health, poverty, political corruption and societal alienation will be fought and won based on what billions of us—consumers, farmers, landscape managers, public officials, business owners, students and others—do (or don’t do) in our million local communities as part of a global awakening and paradigm shift.

We must think, act and organize locally, while simultaneously cultivating a global vision and global solidarity.

## Rule 6: Become a Positive Example of Regeneration

The personal is political. People hear not just the overt message of what we say or write, but also our subliminal message—that is, our presence, behavior and attitude.

Only by striving to embody the principles of regeneration—hope, solidarity, creativity, hard work, joy and optimism—in our everyday lives and practices (i.e. our work, food, clothes, lifestyle and how we treat others and the environment, how we vote, spend our money, invest our savings and spend our time—will we be able to inspire those around us.

In the 1960s, when I came of age as an activist, we had a saying: “There is only one reason for becoming a revolutionary: because it is the best way to live.” I believe this slogan is as relevant now as it was then.

One of the wonderful things about regeneration is that it not only is our duty and our potential salvation, but it can actually become our pleasure as well. As the farmer-poet Wendell Berry once said:

“The care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope.”

Ronnie Cummins is co-founder of the Organic Consumers Association (OCA) ([www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)) and Regeneration International, ([www.regenerationinternational.org](http://www.regenerationinternational.org)) and the author of *Grassroots Rising: A Call to Action on Food, Farming, Climate and a Green New Deal* ([www.organicconsumers.org/grassroots-rising](http://www.organicconsumers.org/grassroots-rising)).

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