

510 Braiding Sweetgrass (Book Review Mar 2023) – Plants Dig Soil Consulting Ltd.

#RealisticRegenAg | Braiding Sweetgrass is a book that covers two very different views of the world: The European way and the Indigenous way. Robin Wall Kimmerer applies her scientific understanding of the world with the indigenous teachings to bring them both together in a very interesting way in this book. Stay tuned to this episode where I'll cover some of the things that I have learned from this.

Newsletter signup:

<https://mailchi.mp/plantsdigsoil/newsletter>

My service offerings:

<https://www.plantsdigsoil.com/pricing/>

Braiding Sweetgrass publisher site:

<https://milkweed.org/book/braiding-sweetgrass>

(NOT an affiliate link – buy or borrow from wherever you like, I don't make any money from this)

027 Cash Crop Intercropping

<https://www.plantsdigsoil.com/podcast/027-cash-crop-intercropping>

028 Cover Crop Intercropping

<https://www.plantsdigsoil.com/podcast/028-cover-crop-intercropping>

Email: scott@plantsdigsoil.com

Twitter (Scott): <https://twitter.com/scottcgillespie>

Twitter (Company): <https://twitter.com/PlantsDigSoil>

LinkedIn (Scott): <https://www.linkedin.com/in/scottcgillespie/>

LinkedIn (Company): <https://www.linkedin.com/company/plants-dig-soil>

YouTube: (Company): <https://www.youtube.com/@scottcgillespie>

Transcript (auto-generated by <https://otter.ai>)

<https://www.plantsdigsoil.com/podcast/510-braiding-sweetgrass>

Braiding Sweetgrass is a book that covers two very different views of the world: The European way and the Indigenous way. Robin Wall Kimmerer applies her scientific understanding of the world with the indigenous teachings to bring them both together in a very interesting way in this book. Stay tuned to this episode where I'll cover some of the things that I have learned from this.

Hi, my name is Scott Gillespie of Plants Dig Soil, the name of the podcast and the consulting company. We're an independent agronomy company. We do not sell products. We provide advice only. We focus on #RealisticRegenAg which has to be proven and profitable. We work in person or remote or a combination of the two. Our pricing is set to be affordable to anyone from a Q&A package to full farm planning. There's no long-term commitments, you can retain our services, do it yourself or hire others. Of course we always love to work with people over the long term.

So let's start out at the beginning of this. First of all, this is a very large book. It covers many stories, many themes, many ideas. It's almost 400 pages, and I found it to go a little bit long. So I'm not even going to try to cover most of the themes in here. And the other important thing is that I'm looking at this from the perspective of of the colonial side. I'm a white person, the white man I have many generations of European heritage behind me so I can see it just from my lens. But it's a fascinating book because Robin has a scientific training and also covers her issues with getting into scientific training and trying to reconcile the two sides of, of seeing the world so I'm just going to highlight a few of the interesting things that I see. But just like normal in any of the other book reviews I've done. I'm not following a particular format or trying to be thorough on it. I'm just telling you some of the interesting things that I learned and I hope that you will pick it up some time or get the audiobook version of it and listen to it. It is a great one to just put on and listen to a chapter a day or just occasionally. Each of them have some very interesting service very interesting things to think about.

Every culture has its creation stories. And any indigenous cultures especially across North America will all have different versions or different parts of the story. In this particular case, she's talking as a person from around the Great Lakes area of North America. And the story here is mostly about a person who is known as Skywoman which comes from the sky and is taken care of the creatures that are already on the earth and they help her to get established and she brings forward the generation of humans that inhabit the earth. And the common theme that I've seen similar creation stories in where I live right now in the prairies of North America is the idea that the humans were considered to be the newest people around and kind of the, the little brothers are the ones that needed a lot more help than everyone else. And so when you see things from this perspective, you're always looking at the nature around you to be teaching you. In fact, that's kind of its job is to be teaching you and your job is to be learning from it. And she contrasts this with the European which is basically the Christian view of things where we have a very adversarial view of creation, for anything are for the from the original story for for touching the apple tree. The humans are banished and they were they were forced into subduing nature and always been fighting against it in their battle for survival. And so it's, it may not seem like a big thing, but when you start thinking about it and thinking about how much the two worldviews oppose each other in how much in subconscious thinking and how you approach things. It's a it's a very different way of seeing things and with me being looking at regenerative agriculture and what it can do, this is where some of the conflict is, is because regenerative is looking at okay what can be what can be learned from what's going on and how can we apply it whereas more traditional agriculture or conventional agriculture is about controlling the environment. And I like how Robin does point out that there isn't a way to go back to the way it was here. In North America. She's not suggesting that that's how it has to be. It's just a way of changing your perspective on things and looking at what can be done differently or how can we look at things in a different perspective?

So the other part of the book that really directly applies to agriculture or regenerative agriculture, and a lot of what I talk about on this podcast is the three sisters. So if you're not familiar, a very common indigenous practice across all of the Americas was a corn beans and squash intercom. And so at its most basic, the corn comes up first or grow first and builds this nice strong stock. The beans come next and they have a stock to to climb up and trellis on they also are making their own nitrogen. And with those Some people believe that it gives its nitrogen to the others. I'm not so convinced on that, but that's a lot of the story behind it, but however it does add more nitrogen and I guess if you think about it more protein into the diet because of its presence. And then the squash is there and that once the main weeds are controlled when it when it takes over. It's a much later one. It shades the ground and of course it just covers everything as it just finds all over the place. And so these are three, three plants growing together and when you put them all together, or when you have a diet with these three, and

you actually are covered fairly well. Now people wouldn't live entirely off of this because there was always buffalo around or other sources of meat or protein and of course there's always other plants around but these were the staples. So she does cover these in one chapter in the book. Now one point that she comes up with that I have never covered in this podcast before, at least I don't think I have is the idea of reciprocity, where instead of us just trying to grow things or trying to maximize the amount that we can possibly get out of it. We we look at the plants or the animals that we're raising to as in a relationship with us. Now, what is an interesting thing and I have seen this before in other in scientific journals or even in in some articles, is that something we have to think about when when we're looking at growing our own crops is that they are domesticated. So when people look at the natural world and just say, well, we could why can't we just live with the natural world and live within it? The natural world works a lot differently because a plant growing in a natural system only needs to do enough to make its own. Make its own progeny pass on to the next generation. It doesn't need to grow as much as possible. And so when we have these crops, we you know, we probably get upset at how much we have to do to to prepare the soil or fertilizer either synthetic or many were or other forms of fertilizer or having to weed them. But the reason we have to do this is that they're depending on us to take care of that. They are competitive but they aren't. They are. They are adapted or growing in a system that has somebody else taking care of that other stuff. And and you might think that that's only a modern thing, but if you think about centuries or millennia, which is actually agriculture has been developing for it's estimated 10,000 years. If over generations, you pick the plants that grow the best under the way that you care for them or if you're passed on seeds of something or genetics of something that that are adapted to the that but give a little bit more calories or a little bit better yield or can grow in a little bit better conditions. You're you're growing something that is that is dependent on you doing that for it.

So how do we apply this to our farming systems or our gardening systems going forward? Well, we don't have to go back and try to replicate the system. This is a system that was created because it worked. And because there are vast trade networks that could that could help spread knowledge and even genetics throughout. I remember reading in the book, Buffalo bird woman's garden, she would actually get new varieties of corn that came long distances through trade networks and she would try them out and if they fit into her system better or if she liked them better, she would start growing them and saving that seed and building up different what we would call varieties for her for her garden, so so we shouldn't try to just replicate the system we should apply it to what we're doing. Another thing that can get lost, especially if you're reading this with a non agricultural background or even non gardening, actually probably more non agricultural because in a gardening system, you could replicate this or do something similar in a backyard garden because you have you can walk in and you can do all the hand applications the hand. You can even do everything without mechanization. Some assistant like this would almost never work in the mechanized system because there's different planting dates. There's leading and then there's vastly different harvest dates. Things could be the corn like be ready early or maybe even the beans are ready early. Especially if you maybe if you eat them a little immature, and then the squash is something's gonna be way later in the fall to two. Temperature so we can't just say that we need to go back to this but we can look at our intercropping systems or our intercropping cover crop systems, which I have talked about in a couple of previous episodes. We can apply this, this knowledge into them rather than just trying to say we should be intercropping we can look at what the problem is that it might solve.

So as you can tell, I've only covered what I learned from a couple of chapters in this book. And there are 32 chapters in the book. Personally, I think it could have been two books it could have either been two books expanded out or, or pared down, maybe to a little shorter, one volume book, but regardless, it's to me I think it's a great book if you want to expand your horizons and perhaps just just making a goal of

reading or listening to a chapter once a week and absorbing the information and the different perspectives that so thank you for listening to this episode. And I will talk to you again next time.