For the past four decades, third-generation Montana farmer David Oien has been patiently seeding a revolution against corporate agribusiness in the belly of the beast: the American grain belt. David is stubborn. He’s uncompromisingly idealistic. And from the tractor seat of his family’s 280-acre homestead in the tiny town of Conrad, Montana, he has quietly inspired hundreds of his fellow farmers to take up a bold new form of agriculture, a more sustainable approach that has kept them from going bankrupt and made them more resilient to climate change.

Forty years ago, when the Oiens and their neighbors were told to "get big or get out," David decided to take a stand and try to hang on to the family farm. He soon learned that it was going to be harder than he thought. He could save the farm, but not alone. To stand up against the entrenched power of the food system’s one percent, he would need to convince hundreds of other farmers to take the biggest risk of their lives.

Dave’s big risk was a radically new crop: organic lentils. A cheap, healthy source of protein, rich in fiber, folate, Vitamin B1, and amino acids, lentils are drought tolerant and don’t require irrigation. And unlike the chemically dependent grains American farmers had been told to grow, lentils make their own fertilizer and tolerate variable climate conditions, so their farmers aren’t beholden to industrial methods. Today, David Oien leads a thriving movement of organic farmers who raise lentils and heirloom grains in biologically diverse farm systems. Under the brand Timeless Natural Food, this “lentil underground” has grown into a million dollar enterprise that sells to Whole Foods, hundreds of independent natural foods stores, and a host of renowned restaurants.

LENTIL UNDERGROUND (Avery / On sale: February 23, 2016) by journalist and UC Berkeley lecturer Liz Carlisle, profiles this unique grassroots movement, confronting the global food system in one of the little-known rural communities that will determine its fate. From the heart of Big Sky Country comes this inspiring story of a handful of colorful pioneers who have successfully bucked the chemically-based food chain and the entrenched power of agribusiness’s one percent, by stubbornly banding together. Unearthing the deep roots of this movement, LENTIL UNDERGROUND introduces readers to a memorable cast of characters, from gun-toting libertarians and Christian homesteaders to peace-sign-waving environmental activists.
Carlisle, a protégé of Michael Pollan, weaves an eye-opening and richly reported narrative. The story of the LENTIL UNDERGROUND’s surprising and engaging character-driven story -- including libertarians, left-wing liberals and fundamentalist Christians— challenges assumptions about the politics of the rural west and the wisdom of “locavore” diets supported exclusively by urban farmers markets. It offers the reader a captivating look at:

- How radical -- and lifesaving change -- comes to a tiny town, far away from the green consumers of metropolitan markets, and intimately bound up with a chemically-based food chain that is woven into the very fabric of agricultural communities.
- How, by ditching synthetic fertilizers and planting a nitrogen-fixing crop instead, farmers can simultaneously combat local and global issues: soil degradation and climate change, farm debt and corporate monopoly.
- The debate about how to feed the world, offering evidence that we can produce adequate quantities of healthy food, take care of the environment, and develop rural economies at the same time.
- How agriculture can be more resilient to climate change and use less water, which is key at a time when water shortages present a critical challenge to our food system and society as a whole.
- How to fix the food system in the belly of the beast – the American grain belt. This world of family farm agriculture is far removed from the farmers markets of coastal cities, but it’s what will have to change if we’re really going to fix the problems with industrial food.
- And much more!

LENTIL UNDERGROUND unearths the secrets of these lentil farmers’ belowground magic, suggesting how the rest of American agriculture might achieve resilience in an increasingly uncertain world. Most importantly, what this book is really about is resilience - how to weather natural and unnatural challenges by coming together in community.

LENTIL UNDERGROUND
Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America
By Liz Carlisle
Avery | Paperback & eBook | February 23, 2016
www.LentilUnderground.com

About the Author:
Liz Carlisle teaches in the Food Systems minor at the University of California, Berkeley and the Thinking Matters program at Stanford University. She holds a Ph.D. in Geography, from Berkeley, and a B.A. from Harvard University. A native of Missoula, Montana, Carlisle is a former Legislative Aide to United States Senator Jon Tester. She currently lives in Palo Alto, California.

About Avery:
Avery, an imprint focusing on health, wellness, cookbooks, fitness, psychology, and popular science, is best known for publishing cutting-edge, but accessible books from the top experts in their fields. Founded in 1976, Avery quickly established itself as the most successful independent publisher of health books in the market. Penguin Group (USA) acquired it as an imprint in 1999 with a strong commitment to continue publishing respected, up-to-the-minute books with a clear focus on helping people make the most of their lives. The Penguin Group (www.penguin.com) is A Penguin Random House Company.
Praise for **Lentil Underground** from College Educators

“What does it take to farm sustainably—and make a living? Liz Carlisle tells the engrossing story of the ‘audacity rich, but capital poor’ Montana farmers who thought lentils were the answer and stuck with them until proved right.”

—MARION NESTLE, Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, & Public Health, New York University, and the author of *Food Politics*

“This book tells the fascinating story from one corner of the ongoing rural renaissance—it will resonate and fascinate, and it will leave you looking for ways to get involved yourself.”

—BILL MCKIBBEN, Schumann Distinguished Scholar, Middlebury College

“Who’d have thought that a book about lentil farming could be a page-turner? With a voice as clear and powerful on the page as it is on stage, Liz Carlisle writes the struggles of Montana’s farmers as an epic. Their battles with food, finance, healthcare and modern capitalism are both inspiring, and a timely reminder that populism needn’t be a dirty word.”

—RAJ PATEL, Research Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin, and the author of *Stuffed and Starved*

“Liz Carlisle’s new book is an absolute treasure—actual stories of real farmers in a part of Montana, some of whom found that their industrial farming practices were a ‘losing game’ and some who discovered that locally adapted organic farming could be resilient and economically successful. It is a must read for anyone interested in the future of food in America.”

—FREDERICK KIRSCHENMANN, Distinguished Fellow, Iowa State University, and the author of *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*

“In an increasingly polarized era when differences and disagreements dominate the headlines, Carlisle’s narrative provides an optimistic case for a renewed commitment to the little things that bring us together.”

—ALEXIS SHUSTERMAN, Ph.D. Candidate, University of California, Berkley, *The Berkeley Science Review*

Additional Praise for **Lentil Underground**

“All of civilization rests on agriculture, and so it follows that real revolutions begin in the soil, which is why the stories of real revolutions must be reported from the ground up, as Liz Carlisle has done so competently in *Lentil Underground*. Read it, engage the real revolutionaries and begin the understand why their work is so vital to all of us.”

—RICHARD MANNING, author of *Against the Grain: How Agriculture Hijacked Civilization*

“Carlisle is a clear and vivid writer . . . an important contribution to the sustainable agricultural genre.”

—HANNAH WALLACE, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Clear, vivid storytelling . . . alive to the ordeals and satisfactions of change as people struggle to create new facts on (as well as in) the ground.”

—CHRIS WALTERS, *Acres*

“Take a chance on this dive in to an eccentric niche of the American farm industry—it has a strange attraction, especially for foodies, business innovators and entrepreneurs . . . A nimble story about how one man’s revolutionary ideas changed the way we eat.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“An in-depth profile of family farmers [willing] to take on corporate consolidation to build a better food system.”

—NAOMI STARKMAN, *Civil Eats*

“In Carlisle’s capable hands, this story of how a few renegade farmers bucked the prevailing culture of Big Ag is riveting and inspiring.”

—KRISTEN GALLES, *Shelf Awareness*

“The book has everything, A group of Montana farmers turning one at a time away from ‘conventional’ ag to organics. The saga of what it’s like to be a renegade in your own community. How political affiliation loses meaning in the face of sharing common difficulties.”

—EVAN KLEIMAN, Host of *Good Food* on KCRW

“This combination of serious academic research and authentic human interaction is perhaps what makes *Lentil Underground* not only an important book but a great read. Carlisle introduces us to Oien and a plethora of other members of the ‘Lentil Underground’ in a way that is accessible, personal and compelling. The writing is top notch and the reader is allowed to make his or her own conclusions about the information presented.”

—DOUG MITCHELL, *Montana Magazine*

“These farmers demonstrate how to build democracy and build soils at the same time. What a deal!”

—FRANCES MOORE LAPPÉ, author of *Diet for a Small Planet* and *EcoMind*
Colleagues:

I write in praise of Liz Carlisle’s new book—Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America. I teach at a selective, public liberal arts college in western New York, and last semester I taught the inaugural version of a course called the Geography of Food. I used Lentil Underground as one of the required books. It was very well received by students and provoked thoughtful and prolonged discussion in ways that other readings did not.

I first learned of Carlisle’s work in a November 2014 op-ed piece in the New York Times. It outlined her research in Montana, and cautioned locavores that it does not always make sense to eat locally—that there are producers in faraway places farming on a sustainable basis who depend on distant markets because of insufficient demand nearby. Carlisle explained the case of Montana’s organic lentil farmers in captivating and eloquent terms.

As I was impressed with Carlisle’s piece in the New York Times, in April 2015 I picked up a copy of Lentil Underground at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Chicago. The book, however, sat unread on my desk for months… As the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester approached, and along with it the specter of developing a new course, I decided to take a chance and make Lentil Underground a required book without having read it myself. I was confident in my decision though, as Carlisle’s piece in the New York Times was so good that I assumed the book would be excellent as well.

My gamble on Lentil Underground proved to be a wise one. After reading the book about six weeks into the semester, all nineteen students in my Geography of Food course were required to submit discussion questions or themes that would engender in-class conversation and debate. Here are several examples submitted by students:

1. Despite coming from different social, religious and political backgrounds, members of the lentil underground movement are unified in their effort to change the face of American agriculture. Are there unifying agricultural or conservation causes similar to the lentil underground movement in the northeastern United States or elsewhere in the country?

2. Anna and Doug Crabtree discuss a number of industries that they wish to change through the Lentil Underground. Anna states, “We’re working with this one-size-fits-all industry, but the key to sustainability is that it has to fit your place.” How has the globalization of the food market impacted our view of the agricultural landscape? How can we begin to reintroduce geographically appropriate methods to improve agricultural sustainability?

3. As a diehard Trader Joe’s customer, I would like to discuss how business practices by Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods can harm small-scale operations like the cooperative run by the lentil farmers. Trader Joe’s employs food researchers who travel the world in search of the next “fad-food.” While this can provide needed business and publicity for small-scale farmers, abrupt pullouts by alternative food retailers such as Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods often lead to the demise of small but sustainable operations. How can these operations protect themselves and should there be any market regulation in such situations?

There were sixteen additional submissions of discussion questions or themes. I choose several at random and had intended to devote one 75-minute class period to discussing Lentil Underground, but we used two class periods and barely scratched the surface of issues raised in Carlisle’s book.

At my institution there is a first-semester seminar that is taught across all departments. The seminar involves critical analysis of issues raised in a book and although I am not involved in teaching the seminar, I had always thought that if required to do so I would assign Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer, The Drifters by James Michener, or Steve Jobs—the recent authorized biography written by Walter Isaacson. I have added Lentil Underground to this list. Carlisle’s book is well written and meticulously researched, and on top of this, it is fun to read and discuss. I am confident that students would embrace Lentil Underground as part of a first-year experience.

DAVID AAGESEN, Associate Professor of Geography
State University of New York – Geneseo
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“[Lentil Underground] is well written and meticulously researched, and on top of this, it is fun to read and discuss.”
Lentils on Campus
During 2015, author Liz Carlisle and main character David Oien (Co-Founding Farmer and CEO of Timeless Natural Food) visited over twenty college campuses, giving public talks, engaging students in class discussions, and visiting student farms and teaching kitchens.

(David, University of Minnesota)

(at Michigan State University, the Ecological Food and Farming Systems Specialization co-sponsored a special Lentil Underground event)

Lentils in the Dining Hall
At several campus stops, the Lentil Underground tour partnered with innovative campus dining programs, which not only aim to serve healthy and sustainable food, but also to serve as a hub for “edible” education.

(Tara Peters at Oregon State University Dining sampled out dozens of lentil wraps)

(Chef Scott Pampuch from University of Minnesota Dining shows off his plateful of lentil and heritage grain creations, including a red lentil dessert)

(For a seminar talk that Liz and David gave at the University of British Columbia, Chef Steve Golob joined in, with a rousing legume and heritage grain demo)
Book Clubs

*Lentil Underground* has also been a favorite for book clubs. Featured in March as the book of the month for Anna Lappe’s [#realfoodreads](#), the book was also selected by this book club in San Francisco’s East Bay, which invited the author to join them for a lentil potluck!

![Book Club Image](image1)

Farm to Table: Working with Restaurants

More than a dozen stops on the *Lentil Underground* tour included special farm-to-table meals, hosted by restaurants with a commitment to sustainable sourcing and a passion for building community through food.

![Restaurant Image](image2)

(David Oien surveys Chef Ethan Pikas’ take on Black Kabuli Chickpeas just before a special Earth Day dinner at Cellar Door Provisions in Chicago)

(Black Beluga Lentils a la Chef Tyler Demora, Local 121 Restaurant, Providence, Rhode Island)