

The Farm

Founder: Stephen Gaskin, born 2/16/35 in Denver Colorado. Served in the Marines from 1952-1955. Taught creative writing at San Francisco State College during the 1960's. Used drugs and was involved in the hippy movement. Served a one to three year prison term in the Tennessee State Penitentiary.

Headquarters: Summertown Tennessee. Located on a 3 square mile campus. Isolated area.

Membership: Several hundred in the U.S.

Doctrines: "Ex-members accuse him [Stephen Gaskin] of openly declaring to be a messenger from God." Mystical religious experiences are encouraged, along with a mixture of beliefs ranging from *tantra* (ritualistic sex), *karma*, and *mantras*, to *bodhisattvas* (incarnations of God in Buddhism)" (Larson's Book of Cults). They are pacifists and claim to be a non-denominational church that freely discusses all religious options. Marijuana is a sacrament that can improve your relationship with God and your family, help you in communication, and aid your love life.

Origins: In the 1960's, disillusioned with the Vietnam war, full of energy, rebellious against the 'establishment,' many hippies moved to the west coast where drugs and sexual freedom were abundant. Gaskin taught a writing class where open discussion became a draw for up to 1500 students. In 1970 a caravan of sixty school buses on a 1500 mile journey across the United States. They settled about 60 miles south of Nashville Tennessee. There were initial setbacks including illnesses, persecutions, and a famine.

Nevertheless, by 1980 the Farm had grown to about 1200. This exceeded the capacity of the land so they purchased more acreage and changed their governmental system to accommodate their growth. They are basically a small town with hospital, school, radio station, etc. Lately the group has decreased in size to several hundred.

Practices: Most are Vegetarians. They live in a communal system and are self supportive. Some work outside the commune in various industries. They are very active in what are called 'green' communities. These are 'earth friendly' groups that seek "to lay the foundation for a major shift in Western consumer lifestyles across the broader culture." Philanthropic outreaches to communities and other countries including rebuilding homes, improving sanitation conditions, laying water pipe, etc.

Publications: Voices from the Farm, Native American Music Directory, Spiritual Midwifery, Home Pest Control, and many others.

Comments: This is not a particularly dangerous group as far as size is concerned. It isn't Christian, encourages drug use -- not only of marijuana -- and is basically no different than any other belief system that hides a person from salvation in Jesus.

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