As the 21st century unfolds, the planet faces daunting challenges on both economic and ecological fronts. Climate destabilization, shrinking biodiversity, water shortages and the degradation of land are proceeding rapidly. On the economic front, in the United States, persistent unemployment, under-investment and the tyranny of finance are eroding conditions of life for the majority of the population. It is clear that we cannot continue solving one of these problems at the expense of the other.

In this symposium we explore a range of cutting-edge alternatives that are “double-dividend” solutions to economic and ecological problems. These are small-scale, household and local community efforts in areas such as food provisioning, goods sharing, time banking, knowledge sharing, self-reliance and cooperative businesses. We will discuss six papers, each of which is a new case study of some aspect of the “plentitude economy,” to use Juliet Schor’s term for this emergent set of practices. We’ll look at transitioning Alaskan towns, Midwestern CSAs, Boston’s Time Trade Circle, raw milk consumers in Brooklyn, a community learning and trading center in Chicago’s South Side and the Haute Vallée region of France, where an alternative economy has thrived for decades. Together, these innovations provide a picture of a more hopeful path for a nation that has lost its way economically, socially and ecologically.