Organic Farmers Rally to Keep Hydroponics Out of Organic

Organic farmers rallied in East Thetford, VT, on Sunday, October 30, to protest the eroding organic standards of the USDA—particularly the federal government’s decision to permit labeling of hydroponic fruits and vegetables as “organic.”

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy challenged the crowd to keep the pressure on the Department of Agriculture. Leahy was one of several elected officials and organic farming leaders who addressed the crowd gathered in support of strict labeling for organic products. “I know the fight we had to go through to get the original organic regulations passed,” he said. “The Organic Food Production Act is one of my proudest pieces of legislation. We know what grown in the soil means, and we know what hydroponic means. I want ‘organic’ to mean organic!”

“I’m not against hydroponic, but I am against freeloaders,” said Congressman Peter Welch (D-VT), standing on a farm wagon. “You’ve got folks, including Big Ag, who want a free ride,” Welch said. “They want to get the benefit of the hard work that organic farmers do and take some of that market share with a label that wasn’t earned.”

U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) told rally-goers. “It is our job to make sure we preserve that brand.” Pingree, who runs an organic farm in New Haven, Maine, warned farmers what they’re up against: “There are 1200 lobbyists on the hill that work for the agriculture and food processing industry. They spend $350 million dollars a year on forming opinions in Washington, and that is more than the defense industry.”

The US government is alone among developed countries in granting the much-desired “organic” label to hydroponic growers. Hydroponic production is a soil-less process that has long been the norm in conventional greenhouse production. Now it is fast becoming the norm in U.S. organic certification for several major crops, such as tomatoes and berries. Hydro plants are fed via fertilized irrigation water. Experts say the explosive growth in hydroponic imports may force some organic farmers out of business as little as five years.

“Organic has always meant grown in the soil,” Eliot Coleman, an influential author and spokesman for the organic farming movement in the U.S., told the crowd. “We refuse to let the promise of organic agriculture be compromised by profiteers. We have won before and we will win again.”

Vermont’s Dave Chapman, an organic tomato farmer who served on the USDA Hydroponic Task Force, told the crowd that the hydroponic invasion has become an “invasion,” as more and more hydroponic producers from around the world discover that they can now gain access to America’s coveted organic market.

“The Federal standards are being taken over by the hydroponics industry,” said Chapman, who noted that Driscoll’s is now one of the most powerful voices on the Organic Program. “Unless we can fight back, ‘organic’ will soon become meaningless. This hydroponic invasion has been almost invisible to the farmers and eaters of America, as no hydroponic food is labeled as such. The more that I learned serving on the USDA Task Force, the worse it got. Who knew that over 1000 acres of Driscoll’s “organic” berries were actually hydroponic? None of us knew.”

The marchers led by Enid Wonnacott, Executive Director of NOFA VT and organic farmer Kate Duesterberg of Cedar Circle Farm.

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Section B: Supplement on Carbon Farming
Rally in the Valley

Men and women farmers, many wearing hand-knitted wool hats and work gloves against the chilly weather, came from as far away as Maine, Pennsylvania, and New York. The Rally in the Valley began at noon Sunday with a 26-tractor cavalcade that started at Long Wind Farm in East Thetford, Vt., and rolled slowly to nearby Cedar Circle Farm.

“Keep the Soil in Organic” and “Take Back Organic” were among the hand-made signs that marchers carried as they sang to onlookers. Twelve-foot-tall puppets of a dragon and Puppet Circus, depicting the sun and the moon, led the way.

The hydroponic invasion into “organic” fruits and vegetables

Most hydroponic production facilities in the U.S. were started after the 2010 recommendation from the National Organic Standards Board (the advisory board to the USDA) that called for excluding all hydroponics from the organic label.

And yet, since that 2010 recommendation, the USDA has welcomed all hydroponic production into the organic certification program, going so far as to issue a clarifying statement in 2014 that hydroponic production qualifications as organic if the companies use “permitted” fertilizers.

On November 16, the National Organic Standards Board will once again consider a proposal to prohibit organic certification to hydroponic producers. The hydroponics industry is attempting to prevent the proposal from coming to a vote of the full Board. Whichever way the Board votes, it is likely that it will be a long struggle before the USDA will actually prohibit hydroponics.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Jack,

I’ve always enjoyed reading TNF, but the Fall 2016 issue had me just about tearing my hair out. On the second page, Jack writes that in this issue “We look at two farms that are successfully meeting high animal care standards while maintaining farm viability.” Well, that seemed like quite a combination, but I was dismayed to find that the first “farm” profiled is Glynwood, where we meet the Vice President of Operations, who tells us that, he was actually trying to make a profit, he would just give up all the other enterprises and get a few more cows. The second farm shown was an example of farm viability and high welfare farming was started by a successful Manhattan literary agent and her architect husband. Though they consider the farm to be “marginally profitable” they admit they have yet to pay themselves anything from the farm. Give me a break.

I’d love to see some farmers that have to make a profit, who really need that money to do things like pay the mortgage and buy diapers, and who still operate high welfare farms get this kind of attention. I know they exist. They don’t have shiny cheese vats, or conference centers. And they probably have pretty different views about certification programs like AWA.

On the positive side, I did really enjoy the rant about the thoughtless vegetarians from the guy at Glynwood, Spot on, that. Michael Gallagher

Square Roots farm

Lanesborough, MA

Thanks, Michael

Glad you enjoyed the rant. I too thought it had a lot of common sense in it.

On the two farms, I get your point. I might argue that profit is not the only goal of either of those farms, only viability. Which to me means they are economically sustainable and will continue. Neither is forced to depend only on farm income for all aspects of the farm, including owner’s sole income. You would be right to point out that ‘viability’ used this way is rather a slippery term, but I would counter that the whole area is slippery, as someone’s idea of whether their farm income is adequate to support them is also totally subjective with someone’s support being subsistence and someone else’s being college tuition for the kids and pension upon retirement. Perhaps I should not have opened that door.

One thing this does point out to the observant reader, however, is how dependent I am on reader suggestions when choosing good interview subjects. I try to make the upcoming topics of issues clear to readers many months before starting work on an issue (on page 2 of each issue, in the lower left corner). That is largely to solicit ideas, interview subjects, articles, opinions, etc. from you all ahead of time to help me shape the issue. If any readers would like to suggest people who might be good subjects for interviews, please Email or call and I will follow up. I know everyone is busy and this is not my job, not yours, but any help will be appreciated and might even save you from premature baldness!

Jack Kittredge

The Natural Farmer Needs You!

The Natural Farmer is a quarterly membership journal of the Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. You may join NOFA through one of the seven state chapters linked at www.nofa.org

We plan a year in advance so those who want to write on a topic can have a lot of lead time. The next 3 issues will be:

Spring 2017: Farming for a Living Wage
Summer 2017: Pollinators
Fall 2017: Organic Market Aggregators

If you can help us on any of these topics, or have ideas for new ones, please get in touch. We need your help! The deadline for the issues are: Spring - January 31, Summer - April 30, Fall - July 31, Winter - October 31.

Advertisers and Sponsors see rate and deadline information at www.nofa.org. Check the menu bar under “Publications”.

Moving? The Natural Farmer will not be forwarded by the post office, so those who subscribe directly should address changes to us. Most readers, however, get this as a NOFA member benefit and should send address updates to their local NOFA chapter.

Archived issues from Summer 1999 through Fall 2005 are available at http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/digital/tfn/. More recent issues are downloadable (starting 3 months after paper publication) at www.nofa.org as pdf files. We also have many issues archived in convenient downloadable form at www.TheNaturalFarmer.org

Jack Kittredge and Julie Rawson, editors
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Homecoming: Back to Hampshire College
Aug 11 - 13, 2017

You may have heard a rumor that the NOFA Summer Conference is moving. Well, I have to admit it’s not the first time. In fact, it’s not even the second time. The NOFA Summer Conference is moving back across town to Hampshire College as its home once again. After a nearly 10 year run at UMass Amherst, we’ve reached the conclusion that it’s time for us to return to Hampshire. Dates are August 11 - 13, 2017!

The UMass team was a very gracious host and worked hard to make their campus the best home for NOFA that they could. They were always attentive and supportive to our cause and the work they’ve committed to on the campus shows their efforts toward sustainability and organic agriculture in their landscape gardens and their Stockbridge School of Agriculture. Ultimately, as you’ve experienced first hand, their logistics never remained stable enough from year to year for what we need. You can look forward to easy parking and closely situated buildings, lots of shady spots and the close community feel NOFA was built on.

Our return to Hampshire is a return to a long NOFA tradition of teaming up with the region’s premier organic agricultural school with a deep commitment to the local organic food system. The alignment of our missions is a match made in heaven and we are looking forward to a long tenure with them once again.

We are presently building an exciting workshop program, lots of fun activities and entertainment to make the 2017 NOFA Summer Conference the perfect weekend for your mid-season respite.

We are offering a Super Early Bird registration during the entire month of December. From December 1st - 31st you can purchase a $99 registration to the 2017 NOFA Summer Conference. Register online at: NOFASummerConference.org. For questions, please contact Christine Rainville, christine@nofa-mass.org.

We hope you will take advantage of our Super Early Bird registration offer, available during the entire month of December. From December 1st - 31st you can purchase a $99 registration to the 2017 NOFA Summer Conference. Register online at: NOFASummerConference.org. For questions, please contact Christine Rainville, christine@nofa-mass.org.

If you wish to propose a workshop for 2017 you can submit your proposal at: www.nofasummerconference.org/proposal. Questions about workshops can be sent to Hannah Blackmer, hannah@nofa-mass.org.

Interested vendors please contact Bob@nofamass.org for information on exhibiting in 2017.

If you missed it, you can enjoy our inspiring 2016 keynote addresses from Leah Penniman and Andre Leu here: http://bit.ly/16videos

Subscribe to: The Natural Farmer by check (to “NOFA”): send $15 for U.S. address, or $25 for foreign address to: 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or by credit card: http://tiny.cc/1rofxw
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Advertising and Sponsorship Representative for The Natural Farmer

The Natural Farmer is the quarterly tabloid journal of the 5000 member Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). Members of all 7 state chapters (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Jersey) plus several hundred direct subscribers receive the paper, which contains features on organic food and farming in the northeastern United States. The paper usually contains 48 pages, with approximately 40% of its space devoted to displaying messages from sponsors and advertisers.

The Ad/Sponsor Rep is an independent contractor working at home who solicits and works with these individuals, farms, organizations and companies to help them effectively display their message. The Rep works directly with the editor to set rates and policies for display space in the journal and to make sure the needs of the advertisers and sponsors are met. He or she also works directly with advertisers and sponsors to make sure their experience with and exposure in the paper is satisfactory.

The Rep sets his or her own hours and schedule and is responsible for keeping available space in the paper sold. Compensation is provided by a commission on all ad and sponsor income generated. The commission is 15% during the first year, and 20% for the second and subsequent years. The representative is also reimbursed for any postal expenses incurred in promoting space in the paper.

Interested people should apply to The Natural Farmer, 411 Sheldon Rd, Barre, MA 01005 or call Jack Kittredge, editor, at 978-355-2853 or Email him at tnf@nofa.org.
News Notes compiled by Jack Kittredge

Glyphosate Found in Honey

Testing for residues of glyphosate, an herbicide developed by Monsanto Co. that has been linked to cancer, has turned up high levels in honey from the key farm state of Iowa.

The Food and Drug Administration began glyphosate residue testing in a small number of foods earlier this year after the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen in March 2015. The “special assignment,” as the FDA refers to the testing project, is the first time the FDA has ever looked for glyphosate residues in food, though it annually tests foods for numerous other pesticides.

Research by FDA chemist Narong Chamkasem and John Vargo, a chemist at the University of Iowa, shows that residues of glyphosate—the chief ingredient in Monsanto’s branded Roundup herbicide—have been detected at more than 10 times the limit allowed in the European Union. Because there is no legal tolerance level for glyphosate in honey in the United States, any amount could technically be considered a violation.

source: Consumers Union Email Nov. 4, 2016

Farmer Killed in Field-spray Dispute

An Arkansan soybean and cotton farmer was fatally shot on Oct. 27 after a dispute over the spraying of chemicals on Wallace’s fields by a neighbor that ruined some of Wallace’s crops. Jones told authorities that Wallace called him to meet Wallace, Wallace grabbed Jones by the arm. Jones said he pulled a handgun that when he met with Wallace, Wallace grabbed Jones said he brought his degree murder charge in the death of Mike Wallace 26, of Arbyrd, Mo., was arrested and faces a first-degree murder charge in the death of Mike Wallace of Monette, AR.

Police said Jones and Wallace had a dispute over the spraying of chemicals on Wallace’s fields by a neighbor that ruined some of Wallace’s crops. Jones told authorities that Wallace called him to meet Wallace, Wallace grabbed Jones said he brought his degree murder charge in the death of Mike Wallace of Monette, AR.

According to a police report, Jones told police that when he met with Wallace, Wallace grabbed Jones said he pulled a handgun from his pocket and “shot Wallace until the gun was empty.”

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NY Times Discovers GMOs Offer No Farm Advantage

An extensive examination by The New York Times indicates that genetic modification in the United States and Canada has not accelerated increases in crop yields or led to an overall reduction in the use of chemical pesticides.

Twenty years ago, Europe largely rejected genetic modification at the same time the United States and Canada were embracing it. Comparing results on the two continents, however, using independent data as well as academic and industry research, shows that the technology has fallen short of the promise.

An analysis using United Nations data showed that the United States and Canada have gained no discernible advantage in yields — food per acre — when measured against Western Europe, a region with comparably modernized agricultural producers like France and Germany. Also, a recent National Academy of Sciences report found that “there was little evidence” that the introduction of genetically modified crops in the United States had led to yield gains beyond those seen in conventional crops.


EPA Delays Glyphosate Review

The Environmental Protection Agency was slated to hold public meetings focused on essentially one question: Is glyphosate as safe as Monsanto has spent 40 years telling us it is? But oddly, the EPA Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) meetings, called to look at potential glyphosate ties to cancer, were “postponed” just four days before they were to begin, after intense lobbying by the agrichemical industry. The industry first fought to keep the meetings from being held at all, and argued that if they were held, several leading international experts should be excluded from participating, including “any person who has publicly expressed an opinion regarding the carcinogenicity of glyphosate.”

EPA said it is “working to reschedule as soon as possible.” But the delay and the maneuvering by industry to influence panel participation does...

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— Chris and Katrina Sunderland

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“We certainly have less clinical mastitis, and the first-calf heifers are calmer, easier to train and milk out better. They are more comfortable with less soreness and no kicking.”

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Chris and Katrina Sunderland, 150 cows, Certified Organic, SCC 100-150,000

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So why are our food exports largely bypassing the world’s poor? As EWG puts it, “most agricultural exports from the United States go to countries whose citizens can afford to pay for them.”

source: Mother Jones, October 5, 2016

Court Rules USDA Can’t Dismiss Sunset Suit

A federal District Court judge has rejected the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) motion to dismiss a lawsuit that challenges changes to the rules that review the potential hazards and need for allowed synthetic and prohibited natural substances used in certified organic food production. Finding that plaintiffs had established both proper jurisdiction and a viable claim, this ruling allows the case to move forward on its merit. At issue in the lawsuit is a rule that implements the organic law’s “sunset provision,” which since its origins has been interpreted, under a common reading of the law, to require all listed materials to cycle off the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances every five years unless the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) votes by a “decisive” two-thirds majority to relist them.

source: Beyond Pesticides, September 12, 2016

Moses Hires New Executive Director

John Mesko has been hired to be the executive director of the Midwest Organic Sustainable Education Service. John steps into the leadership role vacated by the organization’s founding executive director, Faye Jones, who retired from MOSES in March. He and his wife, Lisa, and their daughters, Gabrielle and Sarah, have a farm in east central Minnesota where they raise grass-fed beef.

source: MOSES Email September 7, 2016

NOP: Draft Guidance on Treated Lumber

The National Organic Program (NOP) has announced publication of a draft guidance on treated lumber in the Federal Register (NOP 5036). This draft guidance clarifies that using lumber that has been treated with prohibited substances prior to certification does not affect a producer’s timeline for obtaining certification, as long as the lumber does not contact crops.

source: National Organic Program Draft Guidance, Email August 30, 2016

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source: national organic program draft guidance, email August 30, 2016

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source: beyond pesticides, september 12, 2016

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Appeal to Members for Policy Funding Support

From Jack Mastriani and Enid Wonnacott, NOFA Interstate Council Co-Presidents

Your support is urgently needed to keep NOFA’s policy work going!

We are addressing this appeal directly to NOFA Members for contributions to help NOFA maintain our important regional and national policy efforts. The NOFA Interstate Council (NOFA-IC) is a non-profit 501(c)3 entity and your contributions are fully tax deductible.

Why it’s critical

As one of the oldest organic farming groups in the country (founded in 1971) NOFA’s main mission has been centered on peer education for farmers, gardeners and consumers to create a healthy, sustainable, ecologically sound and economically viable regional food system.

That’s a tall order. Over the decades NOFA has also recognized that concerted grassroots policy advocacy is absolutely necessary to help realize these objectives. Due to the dominance of the industrialized food system there are numerous policy shifts that negatively impact farmers and the emerging food and farming alternatives – limiting opportunities for healthy food advocates to effectively engage in policy discussions and decision-making. This is a critical time to build our strong grassroots voice. As our “NOFA Nation” has grown to seven Northeast Chapter affiliates the NOFA interstate Council’s (NOFA-IC) policy program has led a coordinated approach to fulfilling this task.

And we are not alone. NOFA works regionally, nationally and internationally as a founding member with the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the National Organic Coalition, the Agricultural Justice Project, the Domestic Fair Trade Association and the International Federation of Agricultural Movements.

What NOFA Policy Does for You!

Headed up by Steve Gilman and together with policy staff at the Chapters, NOFA brings an authenticity and grassroots legitimacy to the policy table. As the Interstate Policy Coordinator, Steve works on the regional and national levels, serving as the eyes and ears for breaking policy developments. He maintains our coalition interactions at meetings, conference calls and daily phone and email communications. And he manages the NOFA Interstate Policy Committee, overseeing joint policy projects and coordinating Chapter actions.

Interstate NOFA’s lengthy policy agenda deals with a wide range of issues important to our members – including advocating for bona-fide GMO labeling, pushing for fair and effective food safety regulations, watchdogging organic integrity, promoting viable animal welfare standards, increasing organic research funding and advancing soil health/carbon-building policy initiatives.

Recently, thanks to support from Farm Aid that includes funding for on-the-ground Chapter work, NOFA Policy has been conducting capacity-building trainings with specialists at the IC Retreats over the past two years. In 2015, an advocacy skills training led to Chapter representatives’ participation in a fly-in to meet with their Members of Congress in Washington, DC with mentorship from experienced members of the National Organic Coalition.

This year’s training was centered on movement building via cultivating effective policy relationships with key Members of the 52 Representatives and 14 Senators in our NOFAland Congressional delegation. This project produced successful events on NOFA farms with these officials in their districts – increasing their familiarity with family-scale farming and promoting their understanding and policy support for organic soil carbon restoration practices.

Why NOFA Policy needs your support now

While NOFA-IC Policy works closely with the Chapters, who must sustain their own operations, the Coordinator has a separate annual policy budget that needs to be raised independently. Even though several much-appreciated benefactors have stepped up with significant annual policy gifts, some industry funders who have historically supported NOFA policy have considerably decreased their support in recent years.

As a result NOFA policy has been reaching out to a wider group of backers. And even though there are numerous family foundations that align with our work – there’s a catch – most of them do not accept unsolicited requests. Often all that is needed is an introduction from our members who have personal connections to potential funders for NOFA Policy to become eligible to apply.

The policy funding situation turned critical early this Fall. Although he is still at work maintaining a daily NOFA policy presence, Steve’s 2016 funding ran out completely in mid-September. And 2017 has major funding gaps that must be filled in order to continue the program.

It’s clear Interstate Policy delivers a lot of bang for the buck while maintaining our grassroots program and championing issues that are dear to NOFA Members. The entire policy budget, including Steve’s part-time salary and travel to national coalition meetings, is approximately $36,000 a year. At this point early in the budget process, we project an $18,000 shortfall for 2017.

Thank you for considering an individual contribution and/or providing funding leads. We appreciate member support of our important policy work!! If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation please write your checks to the NOFA Interstate Council c/o Treasurer Julie Rawson, 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005.

Sincerely,
Jack and Enid, NOFA-IC Co-Presidents

To organic farmers everywhere for treating their animals and the earth with care and treating us with some of the finest organic ingredients around, thanks.
**Book Reviews**

**The Art and Science of Grazing:** How Grass Farmers Can Create Sustainable Systems for Healthy Animals and Farm Ecosystems
by Sarah Flack
published by Chelsea Green Publishing (chelseagreen.com), 2016
Soft cover with pictures and charts, 220 pages, $25.97
review by Josh Pincus

The Art and Science of Grazing, by Sarah Flack, is a wonderful and thorough examination of our current thinking on managing pastures for livestock. The book is both an essential introduction to the theories that guide pasture management as well as a detailed assessment of the science behind these practices. This blend of breadth and depth makes this book an essential addition to the reading list for any aspiring or practicing grazer.

The Art and Science of Grazing is written in four parts. The first is Laying the Groundwork, where the author introduces some of the general ideas that overarch grazing and pasture management as a whole. The second section, Grazing from the Plant’s Perspective, focuses on how the actual plants in the pasture live and grow, how they react to different types of grazing, and the vital role that the soil beneath the grass plays in the process. In the third section, Grazing from the Animal’s Perspective, Flack focuses on rumination, how ruminants graze, how their gut generates the nutrients they need from the forage they consume, and some of the many challenges that grass based livestock can face. The final section of the book, Designing and Managing a Grazing System, takes a close look at how to actually put all of the previous ideas into practice out on the pasture. Every section is full of clear and helpful pictures, graphs and charts that help make the clear writing even better.

This book has many strengths and the writing is clear and concise, but the short real-world examples that the author includes periodically are some of her best additions to the text. These examples, like The Art of Good Grazing from page seventy nine to eighty one, take the reader onto the farm, show us how farmers are actually using theory to manage their farms, and most importantly, inspire us to try some of these things ourselves. In this section we read about Thistle Creek Farm, and George Lake’s experiences working toward an extended grazing season and pasture improvement. This exposure to another farmer’s experiences, challenges and successes has always been one of the most valuable learning opportunities for both new and seasoned farmers, and reading about the here-and-now on a farm helps the reader imagine how they might apply these great ideas on their own farm.

The Art and Science of Grazing is an essential collection showing the breadth of the author’s understanding of grazing and pasture management. Like the title says, the book dives deep into both the science of how pasture, ruminants and grazing work, as well as the art of managing this dynamic relationship. This book is an inclusive look at the whole practice of grazing, and it has just the right depth to explain the underlying principles that drive the ruminant/pasture relationship. There are insights here that speak directly to the foundations of grazing theory and the details of management. Flack has here written the best summary of where we are in grazing, but this book collects more insights than it breaks new ground. I look forward to her further work in driving the field forward.

**Changing Season: A Father, A Daughter, A Family Farm**
by David Mas Masumoto with Nikiko Masumoto
published by Heyday Books (www.heydaybooks.com), 2016
soft cover, 192 pages, $16.00
review by Jack Kittredge

When David came of age in the 1960s he tried to run away from the farm to the excitement of Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay area. But he was slowly drawn back, especially as the older generation aged and required more care. He took over the farm, married a Wisconsin farm girl, and decided to farm organically.

The bulk of the book is various essays by David, followed usually with the thoughts of his daughter Nikiko, who has herself returned to the farm and will eventually take it over.

It is hard to describe the variety of thoughts covered in this small book – the seasons, personal mortality, his struggle to raise high quality and delicious fruit when the market cares only about perfection in color and size. In one I particularly enjoyed, The Lesson of the Three-Wheel Tractor, he describes a photo, perhaps taken during the war in Europe, of a farmer driving his ancient tractor down a street to get it fixed. The problem is that the left front wheel is wholly missing, from some accident. He speculates on the farmer pondering the problem of repair – he hasn’t the knowledge or tools to do it himself, he
AG TALES

The freshly picked apple
looked warmly at the farmer.

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“now let me return the favor
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– 19 –

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masumoto loves the practical, rustic life and much of this book is descriptions in loving detail about his work and his ruminations. He talks about just getting by, not being the farmer his father was, how the business of growing has changed while the art of it has not, and his best friend — an old shovel.

Nikiko’s contributions are less philosophical but she seems to be following a similar path to her father — she too tried to escape the farm, but felt drawn back by a deep respect for it that she is still gradually discovering.

i think any farmer will find many reflections here that will bring a smile or a warm remembrance.

Hay Fever: How Chasing a Dream on a Vermont Farm Changed My Life
by Angela Miller with Ralph Gardner, Jr. published by Wiley and Sons hardcover, $23.45, 275 pages, 2010 review by Jack Kittredge

This is the book written 6 years ago by Angela Miller about her decision to move from a successful career as a literary agent in New York City to become a goat cheese maker in Vermont (while still dabbling as literary agent via telecommuting). It is, I know, relevant to many in NOFA who have chosen to change from what our culture would consider a career with high status or income or both to an agricultural or food-based livelihood which may have neither. All for love of the work.

The authors (Miller is happy to acknowledge the role of Ralph Gardner in helping with this book) do a good job of giving the reader a lively, real-time sense of Angela, her life and loved ones, and how she juggles her careers — one in the fast lane in Manhattan and one in the slow Vermont fields once owned by Consider Bardwell and family where she has built an artisanal farm-based food business.
This is as direct and honest a story as you are likely to get from anyone who runs a company. Angela is people-centered and doesn’t seem to need to inflate herself. She talks about her employees as if they were family. She remembers details of triumphs and tragedies equally, and treats them all as significant but not determinative events in her life.

You cannot read this without becoming pretty knowledgeable about goats, cheese-making, running a business, dealing with regulations and all the other things that get between you and your dream. There is no question that her path could not easily be repeated without Angela’s many years of experience in business, the assets (human and financial) she built up during those years in the fast lane, and her determination to succeed while playing by the rules. But it is an inspiration to read about how things seem to fall into place when you care enough.

If I have any quibble with this book, it is the same stream-of-consciousness that makes it enjoyable. So many facts and details and questions suddenly confront Angela, who has to make decisions all the time, that I sometimes get lost in the woods. She employs a lot of people, has a lot of accounts, is producing a product that is both technically complex and depends heavily on critical recognition, and has personal connections she feels compelled to honor. A little more explanation, for someone like me who doesn’t get the nuanced reasons behind her decisions, would be welcome.

If you are anywhere near to having a farm dream, or knowing someone who does, Hay Fever is a good book to read. It gets quickly to the guts of running a farm business—the glory and the agony both—and most importantly reaffirms the reality of personal energy and initiative.
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Northeast Gathering on Domestic Fair Trade

Friday, August 12, 2016, UMASS Amherst
By Elizabeth Henderson and Louis H. Battalen

The Northeast Gathering on Domestic Fair Trade, held during NOFA’s Summer Conference, was a great chance to renew networking with the fair trade movement and to engage in a multi-stakeholder assessment of current programs that aim to improve conditions for farmworkers. Participants included farmers, farmworkers, advocates for both groups, not-for-profit and coop staffers, and academics studying the issues. The major focus of the meeting identified various certification and worker models and explored ways to strengthen the movement through collaboration and mutual support. An intensive go-around of introductions of attendees and their work, provided the space and time to engage full participation by all attendees and served as a preface to the presentations on the various certification and standards approaches and to domestic fair trade.

Following a warm welcoming greeting by NOFA Domestic Fair Trade Committee member Louis Battalen, Elizabeth Henderson, organic farmer and NOFA-NY Board member, gave context to the morning’s proceedings with her introductory remarks, suggesting that because it is still in its infancy, domestic fair trade in the Northeast is a history yet to be written. The people who are working for change, she said, are “making the path as we go forward.” (The power point slides from this presentation are available upon request.) As an organic farmer who has been involved with organic certification for decades, Liz has observed that there is general agreement in this country and abroad on what organic certification covers but no such understanding exists for “fair trade.”

Liz cited the Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA), of which NOFA is a founding member, as an important development in the domestic fair trade story. The DFTA came into existence in 2008, desiring to reach consensus in the movement on what fair trade and social justice market claims should look likeland secondly to serve as a watchdog for both the movement and the public to hold certification programs and businesses accountable to that high standard by evaluating fair trade claims in the marketplace. NOFA’s work falls neatly into many of the DFTA principles, particularly its emphasis on farmers and homesteaders using organic methods and creating fair markets, making it possible for family-scale farms along with the workers on those farms to survive in an unfair economy, one reason, Liz said, that many NOFA members, including herself, have put a lot of energy into Community Supported Agriculture and other forms of direct marketing. In its membership application and in ensuing detailed annual self-evaluations, DFTA members, including NOFA, assess their work based on DFTA’s 16 Principles. The seven NOFA state chapters are consistently very strong, Liz said, on respect and inclusion of family-scale farms and weakest on work for indigenous peoples’ rights. Other questions of mutual concern that both the DFTA and NOFA think about and discuss include how inclusive should fair trade be? Is fair trade a niche or a revolution? and how important is the class divide within the organic family?

In its 2013 survey of some 300 northeast organic farms, the NOFA Domestic Fair Trade Committee found that despite the high principles of organic farmers and a desire to be fair to workers, workers pay workers modestly, providing mainly those benefits required by law. As such, the organic movement confronts a very challenging equation – how to balance the values and needs of organic farmers with the needs of farm workers while trying to ensure that nutritious food is available and affordable? Due to consolidation of ever bigger and fewer entities, the farmer’s share of the food dollar has been decreasing steadily. Farmers in the first ten years of farming are often making less per hour than the people working for them, most of whom, Liz said, are not doing very well laboring in a food system where a gaping race and gender wage gap prevails. The current approaches to farm worker organizing include unionization - UFW, FLOC, CATA, Familia Unidas por la Justicia; worker social responsibility targeting the big brands for pressure down the supply chain - CIW and Migrant Justice; voluntary fair trade certification programs - AJP, IMO and Fair Trade USA; and retail support for improving worker conditions to improve food safety – the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI), a joint project of UFW and environmental groups with Oxfam support.

In her presentation about the DFTA, its director, Erika Inwald, identified the ultimate goals of the organization as environmental sustainability and labor fairness. Members use various methods to achieve these goals, she said – creating high bar standards, evaluating the certification standards of fair trade programs, organizing work on labor and environment policy, and conducting and supporting boycotts of operations and products when appropriate. There are five sectors in its membership (retailers, farmers, farmworkers, processors, advocacy), and the board consists of two members from each sector, with one at large member. One of the goals identified in this year’s strategic planning process is to further the connection of the sectors. Louis Battalen, the organization’s most recent Evaluator for its Fair Facts Program, explained that by evaluating fair trade market claims consumers would be able to better perceive the differences; be able to recognize strong and legitimate programs; the programs would perhaps feel compelled to raise their standards in accordance with the DFTA’s high standards; and collaboration among these programs could be facilitated. The hope, he said, was that such efforts will contribute to lasting change in the market place with benefits to farmers, workers, and mission-driven businesses. The complete evaluations can be found at the program’s website, http://fairfacts.thedfta.org/ Cathy Albisa, the Director of the New York-based National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NERSI), discussed the Worker Social Responsibility model, a worker-driven approach that emerged during the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ (CIW) campaign to ensure and protect the human rights of farm workers in the Florida tomato plantations. Workers are the driving force of this model, she as Unidas por la Justicia; worker social responsibility targeting the big brands for pressure down the supply chain - CIW and Migrant Justice; voluntary fair trade certification programs - AJP, IMO and Fair Trade USA; and retail support for improving worker conditions to improve food safety – the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI), a joint project of UFW and environmental groups with Oxfam support.

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A survey conducted by Migrant Justice had revealed wide change in racial profiling policies by police. The second campaign resulted in a state-bill to allow undocumented people to have driver's licenses. The first campaign focused on freedom of movement and access to rural mountainous geography. The previous successful campaigns specific to immigrant life in Vermont caused by the isolation of Vermont’s rural communities. The Milk With Dignity Campaign follows on two previous successful campaigns specific to immigrant life in Vermont caused by the isolation of Vermont’s rural mountainous geography. The first campaign focused on freedom of movement and access to transportation and resulted in Vermont passing a bill to allow undocumented people to have drivers’ licenses. The second campaign resulted in a statewide change in racial profiling policies by police.

A survey conducted by Migrant Justice had revealed that 40% of dairy farmworkers were receiving no days off in a work week that averages 60 - 80 hours and where 29% of them worked more than a seven-hour day without any breaks. It is under such conditions, Carudo explained, that the workers define their goal in terms of “securing the human right to work with dignity,” recognizing that the model for solutions demands that the workers themselves must be the instigators for designing such changes. They have chosen the Coalition of Immokalee Workers model and are now, with the assistance of NESRI, negotiating with Ben & Jerry’s on crafting a contract that will include third party monitoring, a farmworker-authored code of conduct, and economic relief through premiums paid to participating farmworkers.

Jessica Culley and Elizabeth Henderson presented the fair trade certification program created by the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP). They believe that CIW, EFI and AJP could be complementary programs. As a voluntary program, AJP is trying to create an alternative based on people of good faith making the best choices for the people on their farms. For family-scale organic farms, it is imperative for the functioning of the whole farm that relations between the farmers and people they hire be friendly since most often, they work side by side. CATA, involved with AJP since its inception, thought it necessary to go beyond the “lip service to workers rights” that they believed many in the sustainable agriculture movement were giving, believing, instead, that for a farm to make the claim of fairness, a strong verification system, audited in part by farm workers themselves, was necessary. Thus, AJP’s fair labor standards were created with farmworker input, and, to date, six grassroots worker organizations have been trained to conduct farm inspections.

Presentations also included brief reports on local activities in the host Pioneer Valley area. The Pioneer Valley Workers’ Center (PVWC), according to its director Rose Bookbinder, is working with low-wage and immigrant workers employing strategies and campaigns that are worker-driven, which as of late have included educational outreach, coalition building, and efforts to pass wage theft ordinances in Amherst and Northampton, MA and an unsuccessful hotel union organizing drive.

Alyssa Bauer, who works on the Old Friends Farm in Amherst, talked about the Agrarian Action Network, a nascent farm worker group which has developed connections in the Latino community in Turners Falls, “broadening the connections across racial and class boundaries.” The Network also reached out to the PWVC when it offered a ‘Know Your Rights’ training on two separate occasions conducting the program with simultaneous Spanish and English translation. A rideshare program has also been created. An on-going discussion has centered on “how it’s hard for everyone to find a future in farm work,” whether farm workers are recent immigrants or citizens.

These concerns were reiterated at the gathering by Audi Gonzales, a Guatemalan immigrant, now part of the group of farm workers residing in Turners Falls. “Getting around has been very difficult,” said Audi; “my husband has been stopped by the authorities many times. He works long hours without a break – picking squash, cucumbers, cabbage, and packing corn. 5:30 AM to 11:00PM, lunch for 20 minutes. Farm work is very difficult. Rent is high. We only work six months of the year, and have to figure out how to pay rent in the winter. I love to work on the farm, and I love to be in this country. We are here fighting for our rights and a better future for our children.”

In the discussion that followed, participants wrestled with how to balance farm worker and farmer needs. Both groups are under similar economic pressures. In conventional dairy this year, farmers are operating at a loss even before the farmers pay themselves. Dairy farmers in Vermont loss $4 per hundredweight of milk while huge profits continue to be made in the corporate food industry. An approach, articulated by a representative of the food distributor Red Tomato, is to try to bring everyone to the table in an effort to achieve a price premium despite the slim margins and downward pressures on food prices. Jessica of CATA pointed out that building power has to stem from collective interests, unorganized workers can only represent individual interests. A promising solution would be to re instituted price floors (the old parity system) that provide a sort of minimum wage for farm prices at the same time as a higher minimum wage for farm workers. Although the focus shifted to the next Farm Bill and the need to expand the National Labor Relations Act to include farm workers, as well as press for immigration reform based on human rights, the tenor of the discussion continued to emphasize a solution where the barriers between farmers and farm workers must be broken down in order for sustainable long-term interests to be successfully achieved. Louis closed the meeting with appreciation for all who came and their contributions, and the group was urged to attend the NESAWG meeting on November 10 – 12 in Hartford, CT where the next opportunity for domestic food networking in the northeast can happen.

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