Solutions, Shared Skills & Common Purpose Seen at 2013 NOFA Summer Conference
by Nicole Belanger

Over 1200 people attended the 39th NOFA Summer Conference at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst this August 9-11. Individuals from all over the northeast and beyond gathered to share skills, ideas, and common interests.

More than 200 workshops on wide ranging topics took place over the three days, appealing to the diverse interests of participants -- a mix of farmers, gardeners, land care professionals, homesteaders and consumers.

Begun in 1971 as a gathering of people who were going back-to-the land and realized they lacked the skills needed to make it work, the conference continues to offer grounded practical skills for the homestead and farm. The conference also offered workshops to broaden political, personal, spiritual and other knowledge.

Many ages were represented, with strong showings for the children’s and teen conferences, a continuance in the trend of more younger people attending, and adults of all ages, including elders. The boisterous and fun Expandable Brass Band led the Saturday afternoon children’s parade in several loops around the grounds. Children and adults alike partook in sack races, pie eating contests, the butter-dance and other fun games and contests. Families and attendees enjoyed the unstructured time, sitting in the shade to watch Dale Perkins’ horse-show, and to visit exhibitor and other market tables.

Volunteers played an instrumental role in making the conference work with 17 individuals attending through the Work Exchange program and 60 individuals volunteering their time and receiving scholarships through the Farming Education Fund. Partial scholarships were also available to Beginning Farmers via a 2011 USDA grant through the NOFA Interstate Council.

Workshops of all shapes and sizes

Summer Conference & Workshop Coordinator Ben Grosscup chooses workshops and presenters carefully. Evaluations from prior years, a willingness to work with the committee to tailor workshops to NOFA’s philosophy, and recommendations from others in the community are all taken into consideration. A cross-section of well received hands-on, visually-demonstrative, theoretical, and discussion-based workshops peppered classrooms, kitchens, and grassy knobs of the lush, green campus.

The informal atmosphere of the workshops allowed presenters to share their expertise and knowledge while participants engaged in discussions, sharing their own experience, asking questions and learning from others in the room. “Tell me what I am going to do wrong,” “here, taste this,” and “how did that work for you” were common refrains.

The intersection of farming, politics and policy were addressed in workshops like “Who Really Works on NOFA Organic Farms”, “Cultivating Change from the Grassroots Up”, “GMO Health Dangers & Legislative Initiatives in New England” and others.

Animal workshops included hands-on workshops like “Raising a Family Cow”, “Hands on...” (continued on page 8)
FDA Goes After Outdoor Chickens

On Tuesday, July 23, The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a draft guidance for organic egg producers (and other farmers who allow outdoor access for their chickens) to comply with a salmonella food safety rule, which went into effect in 2010. The guidance applies to any producer with more than 3,000 hens. The guidance is open to public comment for 60 days from publication.

Rather than focus on demonstrated risk factors in salmonella contamination such as confining chickens to battery cages, large flock sizes, infection with flies and rodents, and forced molting (a practice banned in organics), which are common on non-organic, large-scale confinement operations, the FDA is focusing on outdoor access and making it harder for organic farmers, who afford their chickens access to the outdoors, to comply with FDA regulations.

Wild birds were never addressed in the FDA’s salmonella rule, and studies have not consistently shown that farms where hens come in contact with wild birds are more likely to have salmonella contamination. In fact, countries in the European Union require at least 43 square feet per bird of outdoor space, which are great success with reducing salmonella rates without interfering with outdoor access.

The FDA guidance will add unnecessary burdens for producers with outdoor access to comply with the regulations (possibly making true outdoor access economically and logistically impractical). To learn more about this guidance, and to comment upon it before the deadline visit <http://www.fda.gov/Food/NewsEvents/ConstituentUpdates/ucm361861.htm> — Cornucopia Institute press release, July 23, 2013

Naked Juice will also be forced to remove the term “All Natural” and all related statements from its packaging.

source: sustainable Pulse, July 22, 2013

Monsanto Abandons Europe Growing Plans

Monsanto Company said on July 12 that it has pretty much given up any hope of selling its genetically engineered seeds for corn, sugar beets, and other crops in Europe, where opposition to GMO food is overwhelming. The world’s largest seed-maker has nine pending applications with the European Commission, the executive body for the European Union. A spokesman said the company plans to withdraw eight of those applications. The requests have been going nowhere fast for several years,” said Brandon Mitchener, a spokesman for the St. Louis-based company’s European entity. “There’s no end in sight ... due to political obstructionism.”

In 2012, Germany’s BASF halted the development of genetically modified crops in Europe and moved its European research operations in this area to the U.S. Monsanto Company is one of the world’s biggest companies, and the development of genetically modified crops in Europe and moved its European research operations in this area to the U.S.

source: Grist, July 20, 2013

Global Warming in One Graphic

If you look at the last 13 decades, the past three have been the warmest — and Continuously so. But those are just words. Check out this graph unchanted by Ezra Klein on the Washington Post. Klein points out that 2012 was the ninth-warmest year ever recorded — but that could always be a fluke, since average temperature tends to fluctuate year by year. Once you collect the temperature data into decade chunks, though, it’s clear that these record-setting years aren’t outliers but indicators of a stark overall trend. The graph is from a recent report by the World Meteorological Association. The rapid changes that have occurred since the middle of the past century, however, have been caused largely by humanity’s emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
The gray line is the long-term average for 1961-1990 (67 degrees F).

Atmosphere. Other human activities also affect the climate system, including emissions of pollutants and other aerosols, and changes to the land surface, such as urbanization and deforestation.

source: Grist, July 11, 2013

Neonicotinoid Insecticides Pose Environmental Risks

Neonicotinoids are neurotoxins that are highly toxic to most insects, and are one of the most commonly used insecticides in the world. Ninety percent of neonicotinoids persist in soils where they accumulate and leach into waterways, according to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* reviewing current scientific evidence on neonicotinoids. The residues of these chemicals that are often found in soils and waterways have levels that are high enough to be lethal to most insects, including beneficial organisms such as pollinators. Treated seeds may also be toxic when consumed by birds and mammals. Certain neonicotinoids that were banned by the European Commission because of fears that the chemicals are killing bees, birds, mammals and soil organisms are still commonly used in the United States.

source: The Organic Scoop, July, 2013

Genetically Modified (GM) Feed Has Negative Effects on Pig Health

Based on "real world" conditions, a groundbreaking study of pigs fed GM corn and soy revealed striking and statistically significant harm to those pigs. Published in the *Journal of Organic Systems*, the study was conducted by collaborating investigators from two continents and lasted more than five months. They found that GM-fed female pigs had on average a 25 percent heavier uterus than non-GM-fed females. Also, the level of severe inflammation in stomachs was markedly higher in pigs fed on the GM diet. In the study led by researcher Dr. Judy Carman of Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, researchers were interested in any unintended health effects from the use of multiple "stacked" GM genes. Because pigs have a similar digestive system to people, the researchers noted that further studies should investigate if people are also getting digestive problems from eating GM crops. "Given the widespread use of GMO feed for livestock as well as humans, this is a cause for concern," the authors stated.

source: The Organic Scoop, July, 2013

Pesticide Exposure Contributes to Food Allergies

A study published in the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology* has found a link between pesticide exposure and food allergies. Food allergies are on the rise and currently affect one in 13 children in the United States. To examine potential causes of this phenomenon, researchers at Montefiore Medical Center looked at whether contact with pesticides such as dichlorophenols (DCPs) was associated with the increasing prevalence of food allergies. Comparing levels of the chemicals in urine to antibodies to foods in the blood, they found that people with the highest levels of the chemicals were nearly twice as likely to show sensitivity to at least one food compared to those with the lowest levels of those chemicals. Their results suggest that people exposed to higher levels of these pesticides may be more likely to develop food allergies.

source: The Organic Scoop, July, 2013

Glyphosate May Induce Growth in Human Breast Cancer Cells

Glyphosate induces human breast cancer cell growth via estrogen receptors. Several recent studies have shown the potential adverse health effects of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup. The latest study to do so was published in *Food and Chemical Toxicology* on June 8. This study shows that even low concentrations of glyphosate possess estrogenic activity, which could induce breast cancer cell growth. Glyphosate is commonly used for soybean cultivation, which is especially concerning because the researchers also found an additive estro-
Pesticide Use Spikes as GMO Failure Cripples Corn Belt

Pesticide use is skyrocketing across the Midwest U.S. corn belt. Biotech companies like Syngenta and AMVAC Chemical have watched their pesticide sales spike 50 to 100 percent over the past two years. The culprit? Better genetically engineered corn with insecticide built into its genes. Variations of this corn strain—peddled across the world by multinational companies including Monstanto and Syngenta—are giving rise to BT resistant insects and worms, studies show. Now that the targeted insect killings are not working, big agribusiness is simply throwing pesticides at the problem instead of moving away from GMOs. This is despite warnings last year from the Environmental Protection Agency that unregulated use of Bt corn will off-set the balance of the ecosystem.

source: Common Dreams, July 9, 2013

FSIS Label a Victory Against GMOs

Marking a milestone for opponents of genetically engineered foods the USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) has approved a label for meat and liquid egg products made without genetic engineering. Meat may now be labeled by Non-GMO Project stating that the food was produced from animals that never ate feed containing genetically engineered ingredients such as alfalfa, corn and soy. FSIS allows companies to make label claims that they meet a third-party certifying organization’s standards, “provided that the third-party organization’s certification program is now in enforcement.”

source: The Organic Scoop, July, 2013

GMO Wheat Discovered in Oregon

USDA officials report that unapproved genetically engineered wheat has been found growing on a farm in Oregon. The Agriculture Department said the wheat was of the type developed by Monsanto to be resistant to the herbicide Roundup, also known as glyphosate. Such wheat was field-tested in 16 states, including Oregon, from 1998 through 2005, but Monsanto dropped the project before the wheat was ever approved for commercial planting.

While most American soybeans and corn are genetically modified, those crops are largely consumed by animals or made into processed foods. Wheat is consumed directly by people and there has been more consumer resistance. No genetically engineered wheat has been approved in any country. Indeed, one reason Monsanto dropped its development of genetically modified wheat in 2004 was concern from American farmers that it would endanger wheat exports.

Michael Firkko, acting deputy administrator for biotechnology regulatory services in the Agriculture Department’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said federal agents were now trying to determine whether there was any more genetically engineered wheat in 2004 was concern from American farmers that it would endanger wheat exports.

Richard Mathews New Director of WODPA

For early organic advocates it may be surprising to learn that Richard Mathews, early Program Manager of the National Organic Program, is now executive director of the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA). WODPA’s mission is to preserve, protect, and ensure the sustainability and integrity of organic dairy farming across the West. Mathews, who retired from the USDA in 2009, was the official who overturned the NOFA/Massachusetts certification program in 2002 when it denied organic certification to Hubbardston egg producer The Country Hen. Mathews ruled that the company’s small porches qualified as “outdoor access” despite the certification program’s finding that they did not. Now he is in charge of integrity for the western organic dairy industry.


Bob Barnes Republishes “Fertile Soil” for Free!

Oldtimers will rejoice to know that “Fertile Soil” is again available. Published over 20 years ago and until recently out of print, it is a very useful book with a detailed discussion of the effect of organic materials on soil fertility and 27 tables of data virtually unavailable elsewhere on various manures and organic residues and their nutrient content. It has been published digitally under a creative commons license at http://www.potato-peels.com.

source: Bob Barnes Email, August 4, 2013
MOFGA Hires New Executive Director

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) has announced that Ted Quaday, of Santa Cruz, California, will become the organization’s next executive director. Quaday will attend MOFGA’s Common Ground Country Fair in September and will officially start as executive director on October 1.

An organic food advocate, Quaday has dedicated the past 15 years to working for family farms and sustainable agriculture. He is a former program director at Farm Aid, where he worked with family farm and good food advocacy organizations throughout the country.

Also a former communications director at the Organic Farming Research Foundation, Quaday currently provides strategic communications services to advocacy groups working to build the food movement. He tweets at TQorganic.

Quaday’s earlier professional experience took him from work as a broadcast journalist to advocacy on economic and environmental justice issues and work for political campaigns in North Dakota and Massachusetts.

Quaday helped found the Farmer-to-Farmer Campaign on Genetic Engineering in Agriculture and served on the steering committee for the Genetic Engineering Action Network. He also co-chaired the steering committee for the Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems Funders group.

Quaday will be the sixth executive director in MOFGA’s history, succeeding the late Russell Libby, who led the organization from 1995 until his untimely death in 2012. Heather Spalding has served as interim executive director since November and will resume her role as MOFGA’s deputy director when Quaday relocates to Maine.

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In Memory of
Elizabeth
Obelenus

by Stuart Bushnell and Karen Booker

New Hampshire lost one of its most active and staunch supporters of organic farming and the local food movement when Elizabeth Obelenus passed away in June at the age of 55.

A talented artist, Elizabeth was born and raised in New York City and graduated from New York University with a Fine Arts Degree. She lived and worked in New York and New Jersey for over forty years.

Always passionate about good organic food, she apprenticed with a New Jersey farmer when she realized that she would like to grow her own organic food. The farmer suggested she attend the Northeast Organic Farming Association’s Summer Conference in Amherst, Massachusetts. She did so in 1998 and was thrilled to find so many like-minded and enthusiastic people there. She met Stuart Bushnell at the conference and kept in contact until she moved to New Hampshire in 2000 to be with him.

In Stuart Elizabeth found someone who shared her passion for farming, good food and sustainability. The couple farmed his land together. She grew vegetables and flowers for Local Harvest CSA and a local farmers market and Stuart tended his horses and made hay.

Shortly after she arrived in NH Elizabeth was hired as office manager for NOFA-NH. For ten years Elizabeth was the voice and face of NOFA-NH. She was highly visible at the many workshops and farm tours she organized in addition to several outreach programs promoting NOFA-NH. Elizabeth started the Winter Conference and served as its coordinator for several years. She also was one of the farmers that started Local Harvest CSA in Concord, NH.

Many members of the farming community did not realize that she had another passion—her art. Elizabeth had several shows in NY, NJ and NH. She loved to work with birch bark and chalks, make paper and create prints. Elizabeth was so passionate about organic farming, organic food and her art, it is impossible to say which she loved more.

In addition to her four brothers, John, Constantine (Connie), Thomas (Tom), James (Jimmy) and their spouses, Elizabeth left a niece, two nephews and many friends in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire and other places she touched.
(continued from page 1)

Draft Horses”, “Raising Rabbits Organically”, and discussion-based workshops like “Nature as Mentor: Raising Pigs Outdoors”, “Grazing Basics” and “Backyard Chickens”.

NOFA Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals (AOLCPs) were also able to obtain credits through certain workshops.

Workshop categories included alternative energy, animal crops, farm economics and management, farming and the community, food and farm education, food preservation and cooking, garden, greenhouse, herbs, land care, marketing, nutrition and health, the spirit, organic certification, politics and policy, practical skills, soil and fertility, urban agriculture, and tours.

The audio of many workshops was recorded and will be made available. Audio from prior years’ workshops is available online: http://bit.ly/1cIrli3.

Friday evening keynote & Interstate Council yearly meeting

This year’s conference was dedicated to Elizabeth Obelenus, former staff member of NOFA-NH who served both NOFA-NH and the NOFA Interstate Council (IC) for 10 years. Elizabeth died of cancer this June. Jack Mastram of the NOFA-NH board and IC spoke about Elizabeth’s presence and dedication to all that NOFA stands for.

During the NOFA IC annual meeting, IC Policy staffer Steve Gilman galvanized the community to continue to fight for GMO labeling on a state by state level, following the success in Connecticut. As the Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA), potentially the first food safety legislation to be implemented since the 1930s, gets closer to being codified into law, Gilman spoke of the critical importance for people on the ground, both producers and consumers, to submit individual comments to the FDA by the November 15th deadline. That which becomes law will be in place for decades to come, and the thriving future of food depends on its being reasonable for farmers and producers.

No one wants to have a new law devasted by another development project, she came to recognize herself as an expert in organic farming, having farmed for 20 years, and took on the industry. With a good lawyer and her farm’s Organic System Plan, Diffley was able to reroute the pipeline from her land and also work with state legislators to create standards for preservation of organic farms.

She also encourages the organic movement to reframe the language it uses. Instead of organic vs. conventional, she asks for a shift to organic vs. non-organic. Recognizing organic’s development in the past 40 years as a social movement, she encouraged the community to have “engaged optimism” noting that “our efforts won’t succeed at first” but must be stuck with. She encourages people in the movement to run for office and inquire about candidates’ farm policies.

Saturday Evening Debate: “Is organic certification right for you?”

Ryan Voiland of Western Massachusetts; Justine Denison of Schaghticoke, New York; Atina Diffley of Minnesota; and Mark Dunau of Hancock, New Hampshire participated in the Saturday evening debate “Is organic certification right for you?”

Picking up moderator Jack Kittredge’s opening question, Voiland also touched on the issue of livestock grain, noting that “local” hides a major issue – unless livestock grain is organic, it is almost certain to be GMO.

Mark Dunau’s farm was certified organic by NOFA-NY from 1990-2001. When the National Organic Program (NOP) standards were implemented in 2001, he felt the federal government usurped those who helped build the organic label. In 2002, Dunau worked with other farmers in New York to create the Farmer’s Pledge, which NOFA-NY and NOFA-CT offer as an option to their members. Though he still employs the same techniques, Dunau dropped his organic certification in 2002 as he felt the NOP was deeply flawed, unduly burdensome and financially unnecessary for direct sellers. He feels consumer’s knowledge and the farmer consumer relationship is equal to or greater than certification.

Dunau argues that certain concepts people consider essential to organic are not included in the USDA certification - concepts like food miles, food healthfulness, humane treatment of animals, fair working conditions, and environmental issues. Dunau also calls into question the growing practices of farms overseas that contract with companies like Walmart, which he argues further muddy the term organic.

Justine Denison and her husband have farmed in Schaghticoke, NY since 2005 and choose to be certified through Certified Naturally Grown (CNG), an organization which brands itself as an grassroots alternative to USDA certified organic.

For 16 years the Denisons were conventional farmers in Maine. Then three of their four family members got sick, especially Justine’s husband, who sprayed the pesticides. After detoxifying and finding their own land in New York, they made a firm commitment to farm organically. They directly market their CSA and explain their practices and certification to consumers.

For the Denisons, having CNG certification is a stepping stone. Just starting out they didn’t feel they had the time or money to become USDA certified organic. They also like that other CNG farmers are...
part of the inspection process, available for networking and problem solving.

When Atina Diffley and her husband were starting out people didn’t know how to spell organic. Now that the social movement behind organic can count its successes, she feels keeping grassroots voices in the organic movement as it becomes a part of established systems is important. “If we want to make really big changes, we have to have a way to be counted, to be really visible and make demands,” said Diffley. As the market grows for local and natural, large corporate interests are taking advantage of the popularity of organics by co-opting the movement and greenwashing products.

As she discovered when trying to keep her land from being destroyed by a crude-oil pipeline, organic certification protected her as a farmer. She feels as more drift cases, eminent domain and other potential contamination of organic farms occurs, nationally recognized organic certification is going to be crucial in protecting organic farms.

Diffley also feels that the documents needed for organic certification are records that farmers should be keeping and that after the first year it becomes easier to review and improve the same documentation.

Organic is not only the absence of chemicals

It’s not what you’re against, but what you are for. Organic is not only the absence of chemicals, but the presence of regenerative ecosystems, nourishing food, and strong, local communities. Each person in attendance has her own definition, values, and practices.

The sense of enthusiasm for being among likeminded people was visible in the interactions during and between sessions, in dorm hallways and the grassy tent-filled camping area. “Learning new things is great, but the community is what I look forward to,” shared Sharon Gensler of NOFA/Mass.

Many attended the scything demonstration to learn this old and valuable skill.

Farming, especially with a commitment to organic practices, can sometimes be isolating. The conference appeals to many with its focus on solutions, developing relationships, and sharing skills and passions, apparent in the numbers in attendance at this year’s conference and the quality of their experiences.

### BIONUTRIENT Food Association

For the fourth year running, the Bionutrient Food Association will present another series of workshops for the coming growing season. Our goal is to engage and build on what you already know and are doing, and to find ways to increase the bionutrient levels, or “nutrient density”, of your soil and crops for greater yields, healthier produce and better marketability. Workshops will be led by the Executive Director of BFA, Dan Kittredge, the son of prominent leaders in the organic movement, and an organic farmer since childhood. Dan is passionate about raising the quality of nutrition in our food supply through collaboration with committed individuals and organizations that support growing and eating really good food.

The cost of workshops is $150 for the two sessions, or $125 for returning students. Substantial financial assistance is available, provided by the Forrest C. & Frances H. Lattner Foundation to encourage farmer participation.

Free introductory lectures will also be presented at most locations during September.

For more information and to register online, visit: www.bionutrient.org/workshops.

### Principles & Practices to be covered

#### Identifying Deficiencies
Overview of soil depletion causes & solutions; Interpreting soil tests; Mineral balancing & amendments; Composting for fungal or bacterial dominance; Seed vitality & sources; Biological inoculation...

#### Principles of Biological Farming
Biological symbiosis as ideal mode of plant feeding; Complete & incomplete compost; Nutrient synthesis & proteolysis & correlation to pest & disease pressure; Management systems & steps to realize potential...

#### Vital Health in the Field
Strategies to address limiting factors before & after they present; Nutrient drenches & foliar sprays; Testing – conductivity, pH, tissue, weak acid, refractometers & brix measurements; Soil life & fertility for nutrient & disease management strategy; Effecting expansion & fruiting aspects of growth...

#### Managing Crops Through the Season
Observing, understanding & managing plant structure & development; Learning from weeds; Preemptive methods of dealing with disease; Crop energetics; Prolonging the harvest...
Selling Local: for Urban Consumers it’s about more than Distance

by Scott Budde, CFA
For at least one sample of consumers in New York City, the definition of “local” is all over the map. Informal conversations with urban farmers’ market customers (after they had completed a short “Local Preferences Survey”) helped explain the wide range of responses. Simply put, for these urban consumers the term “local” has more to do with factors such as a connection with or trust in a grower than it does with the consumer’s distance from the farmer.

The Survey (Fall 2012)

In the fall of 2012, my associates and I conducted a “Local Preferences Survey” as part of the Sustainable Agriculture Credit Union Research Project, a project investigating the creation of a credit union focused on the NOFA chapters and MOFGA. Because the proposed credit union would operate across the Northeast, we wanted to see if a “depositor” from one part of the region would care if the CU also lent out funds in other parts of the region.

In considering the formation of such a credit union, we wanted depositors to feel that the CU was lending to farms and related business that those depositors felt were local (or local enough). Would a depositor from NYC care if the CU made a loan to a farmer in Maine or Vermont?

To find out, we worked with Grow NYC – the organization responsible for New York city’s Greenmarket farmers’ markets – to pilot a survey at the Union Square Farmers Market. Union Square is in the heart of Manhattan and has direct access to several subway lines and is a big market. According to Grow NYC, the market has over 140 “regional” vendors and an estimated 60,000 shoppers per day pass through Union Square. The market is open 10 hours per day, 4 days per week.

Here’s how Grow NYC describes who sells at the market.

“Greenmarket’s farmers and fishers come from a broad section of the Northeast, including parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and New England, providing New Yorkers with a bountiful and astoundingly diverse array of fresh foods.”

In analyzing the data, perhaps our greatest insight came from seeing how much these definitions overlap. For example, “within 100 miles” of NYC includes farms in much of upstate NY, almost all of MA, southern VT, southern NH, MD, DE and parts of VA. Finally, “within New York State” or “within the Tri-state Region” would include farms over 300 miles away.

The Results

While there are a variety of insights to be derived from these data, we focused on the question of how shoppers at the market define local food. The graph above shows the question we asked and what we found.

“Local Preferences Survey - Results

Q1: How do you define “local” food? Please choose one. (N = 111)

- Within 250 miles of the market 10%
- Within 100 miles of the market 34%
- In the Tri-state region (NY, NJ, CT) 22%
- In the Northeast 4%
- Anything at the farmers’ market 10%
- Within USA 2%
- In New York State 14%
- I don’t know Other / No answer 4%

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More Examples

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The Results

While there are a variety of insights to be derived from these data, we focused on the question of how shoppers at the market define local food. The graph above shows the question we asked and what we found.

In analyzing the data, perhaps our greatest insight came from seeing how much these definitions overlap. For example, “within 100 miles” of NYC includes farms in much of CT, NJ and eastern portions of PA. “Within 250 miles of NYC” would include farms in much of upstate NY, almost all of MA, southern VT, southern NH, MD, DE and parts of VA. Finally, “within New York State” or “within the Tri-State Region” would include farms over 300 miles away.

The Survey (Fall 2012)

In the fall of 2012, my associates and I conducted a “Local Preferences Survey” as part of the Sustainable Agriculture Credit Union Research Project, a project investigating the creation of a credit union focused on the NOFA chapters and MOFGA. Because the proposed credit union would operate across the Northeast, we wanted to see if a “depositor” from one part of the region would care if the CU also lent out funds in other parts of the region.

In considering the formation of such a credit union, we wanted depositors to feel that the CU was lending to farms and related business that those depositors felt were local (or local enough). Would a depositor from NYC care if the CU made a loan to a farmer in Maine or Vermont?

To find out, we worked with Grow NYC – the organization responsible for New York city’s Greenmarket farmers’ markets – to pilot a survey at the Union Square Farmers Market. Union Square is in the heart of Manhattan and has direct access to several subway lines and is a big market. According to Grow NYC, the market has over 140 “regional” vendors and an estimated 60,000 shoppers per day pass through Union Square. The market is open 10 hours per day, 4 days per week.

Here’s how Grow NYC describes who sells at the market.

“Greenmarket’s farmers and fishers come from a broad section of the Northeast, including parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and New England, providing New Yorkers with a bountiful and astoundingly diverse array of fresh foods.”

In analyzing the data, perhaps our greatest insight came from seeing how much these definitions overlap. For example, “within 100 miles” of NYC includes farms in much of CT, NJ and eastern portions of PA. “Within 250 miles of NYC” would include farms in much of upstate NY, almost all of MA, southern VT, southern NH, MD, DE and parts of VA. Finally, “within New York State” or “within the Tri-State Region” would include farms over 300 miles away.
While “within a 100 miles” was the most frequent (34%) answer, 79% of respondents opted for regional (i.e., multistate) definitions of “local.” State boundaries were important to only 14% of respondents and few considered products outside the Northeast to be “local.”

In addition, one-on-one follow-up discussions with some respondents who discussed their thoughts after completing the survey revealed some interesting mis-perceptions. Many respondents:

• Seemed to assume that vendors selling at the market met their particular definition of “local” (even if they didn’t).
• Weren’t aware that Grow NYC had criteria for which vendors sold at the market (which they did)
• Seemed to assume all produce at the market was certified organic (which it wasn’t).

These mis-perceptions and the wide range of “local” definitions pointed to other factors that were important to shoppers at the market. Anecdotally and from other survey responses we saw that many shoppers simply want food they could trust, that tasted good, was convenient to purchase and with which they had some connection. Importantly, none of these factors was intrinsically related to geography or proximity though all could be.

Finally, these shoppers had lived, worked or studied in many parts of the region and this seemed also to drive the wide range of definitions of “local.” Their broad range of life experiences simply led to an affinity for different or broader definitions of “local.”

The Lessons

For small-scale, sustainably run farms in the Northeast, there are a number of positive lessons:

1. High-income urban consumers are absolutely amenable to a wide range of local foods from across the region. With the right distribution – whether through farmers’ markets or through food hubs and aggregation services – rural farmers can establish a “local” trust and connection with urban consumers. This is very positive for future growth of the sector and farms in rural areas of the Northeast.

2. While a simple measure of farm proximity does not seem to define “local,” targeting urban consumers does clearly rely on establishing some sort of direct contact through farmers’ market presence, social media and physical mailings. The latter might be combined with alternative types of distribution (such as through food hubs or shared distribution of some kind).

Unfortunately, the lack of a strong geographic connection can also be exploited by industrial producers. Walmart’s advertising that they purchase food from “local farmers across the nation” or Hood’s line of New England Creamery Ice Cream that “offers a delicious tribute to New England icons, from the quaint B&Bs of Cape Cod and Vermont’s ski lodges to forest and lake retreats nestled in Maine” are two examples of what we might call “geo-washing:” strategies to obscure, diffuse or mislead someone about the location of an activity. My guess is that these corporations do employ these marketing strategies because they know that the strategies will help form some type of connection or trust.

Conclusion

Consumers of small-scale, sustainably-produced food think about “local” in many different ways. While many consider it to be a matter of distance or linkage to a distinct community, for a group of urban consumers it was a far less place-based definition. For these consumers, “local” seemed more about connection to and trust in the food or producer. This is great news for the future growth of small-scale farms in the Northeast – because urban markets are big markets. However tapping into these markets will require appropriate distribution networks and marketing strategies that create these types of connections and trust.
If you are, or would like to be a grower of:

- organic broccoli
- organic blueberries
- organic strawberries
- organic melons

Please contact Mike Bethmann, Rich Thorpe or Brian McKeller regarding potential opportunities:

- mike.bethmann@wholefoods.com
- richard.thorpe@wholefoods.com
- brian.mckeller@wholefoods.com

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What the Cluck?  
by Jason Reimers

It seems like everybody is raising chickens these days. An attorney in my firm brings in a few dozen eggs each week that are divvied up among others at the firm and a mysterious guy named Steve who picks up his eggs each week.

I get my eggs from a friend in the Attorney General’s Office whose chickens lay a storm, and like many who get their eggs from amateur egg purveyors, I appreciate the heterogeneity of the eggs—some are light blue, some are big, some are small, etc. I like the price of mine (free), but even if you pay for your neighbor’s or colleague’s eggs, you probably like the freshness and keeping your money in the local economy.

If you are considering keeping chickens in your backyard, you should first read your town’s zoning ordinance and other land use regulations. In New Hampshire, unless you live in Concord or Manchester, you probably won’t get a clear answer, as zoning ordinances include two districts in which agriculture is permitted, you may be out of luck. But, read your ordinance’s definition of “agriculture” carefully because there may be a loophole.

For example, consider that the Dublin, New Hampshire, zoning ordinance includes two districts in which agriculture is not allowed. The Dublin ordinance defines “agriculture” as follows:

The use of land for farming, dairying, pasturage, agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, animal and poultry husbandry and the necessary accessory uses . . . . This does not include the keeping of customary household pets and animals.

So, if you can’t do “poultry husbandry” where agriculture is not allowed, does raising chickens in the backyard count as “the keeping of customary household pets and animals?” If this provision were meant to only apply to dogs and cats, the word “animals” would not need to be added to “pets.” There is a legal canon of statutory interpretation that says that statutes must not be interpreted in such a way that would render some words superfluous.

Applying that canon to the Dublin ordinance raises the question of whether chickens are “customary household animals.” Prior to the relatively recent advent of industrial chicken farms, backyard flocks of chickens were quite common (read: customary). Further indication that chickens may be customary household animals is a New Hampshire law originally enacted in the mid-nineteenth century that includes a list of basic occupational and household items that may not be taken from you to pay off your debts. Listed along with items such as comfortable beds, a bible, a cook stove, and a sewing machine are “domestic fowl not exceeding $300 in value.” It would appear, then, that chickens are customary household animals and that the keeping of them would not constitute “agriculture” in Dublin.

If this is true, and if keeping chickens does not constitute “poultry husbandry,” then, barring other provisions of the ordinance, the keeping of chickens might be permitted in any district in Dublin.

If you live in a zoning district in which agriculture is permitted, you might be able to have chickens. If you don’t live in a district that permits agriculture, you may be out of luck. If you live in a zoning district in which agriculture is permitted, you probably won’t get a clear answer, as most zoning ordinances do not specifically mention chickens. If chickens are not mentioned, check for where agriculture is permitted. If you live in a zoning district in which agriculture is permitted, you might be able to have chickens. If you don’t live in a district that permits agriculture, you may be out of luck. But, read your ordinance’s definition of “agriculture” carefully because there may be a loophole.

No matter where you live, make sure you understand the laws before you get chickens. You can call the town for clarification if you need it. If chickens are permitted where you live, make sure you comply with the entire zoning ordinance, including any requirements about fences, restrictions on commercial sale of eggs, and manure disposal. If you build a coop, make sure you comply with setback requirements from lot lines and water bodies and other outbuilding restrictions so that you don’t have to move the coop later on. Also be aware that some ordinances allow only hens. Even if an ordinance does not expressly prohibit roosters, the ordinance probably prohibits noise or conditions that interfere with your neighbors’ enjoyment of their property. You don’t want a lawsuit over your chickens. It is better to share eggs with your neighbors than it is to trade legal documents with them.

Jason Reimers is an attorney with BCM Environmental & Land Law, PLLC, in Concord, New Hampshire, or www.nhlandlaw.com. This article is intended to get you started. It is not legal advice. Jason is also a monthly columnist for the Monadnock Ledger-Transcript, where a version of this article has appeared.
I have always attempted to grow organic fruit, not for commercial production, but just so I can have fresh fruit during the New England growing season. Growing Organic Orchard Fruits covers every possible scenario concerning two types of fruit. Pome fruits include apple, pear, quince, medlar, loquat and other fruit that contains multiple seeds in the core. Stone fruits (apricot, cherry, nectarine, peach, plum) have a single, large seed contained within a hard pit at the fruit center.

A brief history of organic practices up to the present National Organic Program (NOP) and reasons why we should grow fruits organically are provided. The writer asks the reader to consider climate, soil, irrigation, topography, site history and the surrounding neighborhood, plus access and utilities while considering the design of a new orchard or a redesign of an existing one. Tree sizes and training systems such as tatura taining or using a central leader method need to be considered before you plant.

Are you going to open a U-pick business? Thinking ahead and designing in advance saves money and avoids correcting mistakes later on. Site preparation of your site is essential. Soil standards, mineral nutrients and organic amendments as well as weed and pest control need to be considered.

Two chapters cover every stone fruit and pome fruit crop imaginable. I found these chapters very informative about varieties, some I have never even heard of. Temperature requirements, pollination, and varieties of apple and pear rootstocks are explained. Otherwise unknown fruits that can be grown and enjoyed at home are quince, medlar, mayhaws, loquats and saskatoon. There are many tables throughout the book but the best one is on disease resistant apples; times of blooming, ripening dates, and resistance to the four big apple diseases (apple scab, cedar-rust, fire blight, powdery mildew). It also describes how well and how long apples keep in storage. Where are they grown? Are they commercially available for home and market orchards. Another table presents cold-hardy apples for northern regions. Pear varieties are given equal attention along with quince, mayhaw and loquat. Apricots, cherries, peaches, nectarines and plums are covered thoroughly in chapter six.

Detailed advice on what varieties to purchase is provided as well as handling, preparing for planting and much more information on training the trees during the first year. Nutrient management and how to determine the nutrient status of your crop are detailed fully. This is done by testing your soil, and also observing the foliage and fruit of your existing trees. Another useful tool is a chart of typical symptoms and treatments of nutrient deficiencies and excesses. Approved materials are discussed along with how to calculate how much you will need for your situation. Also, how to use the system to maintain proper nutrient control through planting cover crops as well as organic and living mulches, is also discussed.

Chapter ten is all about disease management for pome and stone fruits, individually and altogether. Root diseases are also something the grower needs to be aware of. And what would growing fruit be like if there weren't a few birds, mammals and rodents to throw a wrench into the works? Fortunately, there are solutions for all kinds of pest management in chapter eleven.

So you have planted your trees and gotten them to grow and now you need to prune them to keep them healthy and productive. A tree that isn't pruned can actually inhibit your fruit production due to not enough light reaching the fruits on the branches. Lots of information regarding when to prune, how to prune to train, types of pruners, types of training and pruning by various crops are covered in chapter twelve.

Chapter Thirteen covers fruit thinning and harvesting, crop by crop. For those of you who want to grow for market, the last chapter covers developing a business plan, and marketing your business. Everything from selecting produces, creating a farm design, selling locale, setting prices, advertising, packaging and selling is covered.

Although I never intend to sell for market, this book gave me lots of information for growing at home on a small scale. It also gave me a lot to reconsider and to try with the apple and plum trees and cherry bushes that I currently have growing on my land. There are several helpful tables and lots of illustrations throughout the book. I especially enjoyed the list of other fruits that I never knew existed and now want to try.

The one thing I did not like about the writer is that he suggests the use of an herbicide, glyphosate, "admittedly at the risk of offending some readers," for serious weed control before planting the new orchard and then waiting three years to become certified organic. Tsk, tsk, Mr. Barney, there is no room in any world, organic or conventional, for glyphosate. But I would not suggest you disregard the entire book due to this one note. I know I will be referring back to it many times for varieties and general information.

The Art of Balancing Soil Nutrients
by William "Crop-Doc" McKibben
published by Acres USA; www.acresusa.com
Copyright 2012. 240 pages, softcover
review by Luke Pryjma

Soil balancing is not a one and done job. Bill operates on the nutrient solubility/complexity model for organic crops. The system is too weak for the balanced microbial metabolite model of nutrient uptake. My one critique is that bioavailability is not discussed enough. Soil balancing is not a one and done job. By understanding what the crops take away we can manage for a balanced return to the soil. Bill McKibben recommends we keep in mind that "plants grow to the least available nutrient". By managing for the least available nutrient we are much more likely to achieve balanced soil health for optimal health from our food.

Bill covers many applications of balancing soil nutrients. Turf, corn/beans/wheat, and vegetable production are considered to varying degrees. I found it amazing that there exist some golf courses in the US, by luck of location, that have luxury levels of the trace minerals I am trying so hard to manage for on my farm. It will take me years of small safe applications of potential harmful trace minerals to achieve new levels and optimal health from my food. One figure that was inspiring to me was Bill’s flow chart for balancing soil minerals. Currently, it is pretty basic but given to the next generation to add to it could be a very powerful soil health decision-making tool. Also, I appreciated Bill’s discussion on crop removal rates.

Soil balancing is not a one and done job. By understanding what the crops take away we can manage for a balanced return to the soil. Bill McKibben recommends we keep in mind that "plants grow to the least available nutrient". By managing for the least available nutrient we are much more likely to achieve balanced soil health for optimal health from our food.

My one critique is that bioavailability is not discussed enough. Bill operates on the nutrient solubility model for understanding how nutrients enter the plant. As has been brought up at the NOFA/Mass sponsored Soil Health and Nutrition Conference, farmers and consultants are now considering the microbial metabolite model of nutrient uptake. Briefly, the bioavailability of the products, how quickly they become or in some cases already are microbial metabolites, may prove to be the most efficient metric for fertilizer measurement.
Bone Broths, Fat, Bones, Head Cheese, Chicken Feet, Organs, & Kefir
by Julie Rawson

As time marches on, Jack and I work harder to stay healthy, mobile, and clear-headed. What we look for granted in the strength and ache-free department in our 20’s has become more of a daily diligence as we enter and prepare to leave our 60’s.

I was first introduced to Sally Fallon and her complete traditional eating cookbook – “Nourishing Traditions”. Two years ago I started asking for chicken feet and lard. For a while I just prepared and sold those items to those early Weston A. Pricers, but after a while I got out of my more “conventional” food preservation mindset – canning and freezing of “regular” vegetables – and started to follow my customers’ lead. The good news for a farmer is that you can sell all those expensive cuts of beef back to your customers, and you can keep all the really nutritious food for yourself. Now we guard the lion’s share of the chicken feet (we produce about 850 clean meat bird feet each year), all the trimmings and bones and left-over fat from the pigs and pigs, and the pig heads (Jack gets credit for catching on early to this one) for ourselves.

Let’s Start With Chicken Feet. – A customer asked me the other day how I got over the chicken feet thing. I pressed her and she alluded to the fact that they walk in their own manure. Where we get our birds slaughtered, they run the entire bird through a machine that “plucks” the feathers. They cut the heads and we freeze those for our dogs. They get one each day until they run out. This is probably the best thing you can feed your farm dog, as these heads are packed with nutrition. I know that I should make stock out of these too, but figure the best pay goes to our security force – without whom we could not operate. Once the feet go through the plucker, the outer layer of skin slips off and you are left with a clean foot. Any member of a traditional plucker, the outer layer of skin slips off and you are left with a clean foot. Any member of a traditional society will tell you that chicken feet are a delicacy. We were just discussing the other day on the farm how the stock made from chicken feet is significantly richer than stock you get when you boil down a lot more meat. We were just discussing the other day on the farm how the stock made from chicken feet is significantly richer than stock you get when you boil down a lot more meat.

For head cheese, we take the heads (we produce about 850 clean meat bird feet each year), all the trimmings and bones and left-over fat from the pigs and pigs, and the pig heads (Jack gets credit for catching on early to this one) for ourselves.

Kefir – The most recent addition to our diet, and I think the most important, is kefir. You can read about it online, and in Annesse Brockley’s excellent book “Auto Immune”. Kefir is a very old cultured milk drink that beats yogurt by about 20 more beneficial organisms and it will take up residence in your gut and clean house there. It is super easy to make because it cultures at room temperature. Starter “grains” can be purchased on Amazon of gotten from a friend. Put 1/2 – 1 cup of starter from your last batch in a half gallon of raw milk and put it on top of the refrigerator for 48 hours. After this time the kefir will look like yogurt. Skim off the cream that is on the top and re-inoculate another half gallon. Store the kefir in the fridge and eat lots of it. It will cure anything that ails you. We have it with raw eggs, coconut oil and frozen berries every morning for breakfast.

For a soup stock, start with a couple of cups of your favorite dry beans, soak them for 12 or so hours. Discard the liquid, rinse and then cook them (without salt) until tender in stock. Throw in your favorite head cheese, lard, meat, or what have you, and then some canned tomatoes, or what ever is in the root cellar or garden, depending on the time of year. Add greens and herbs at the last minute so they retain their food value. For this soup, I leave it on the wood stove all morning and add things in appropriate order.

We feed between 5 and 15 people 5 days per week. These soups are always a hit, even with picky teenagers, and are easy to prepare quickly for the busy farmer who is pulled in many different directions. They are rich with fat, complex starches, flavorful meat or dairy, and tender vegetables. The staff is energized to go back out and put in a good afternoon of work.

Organic Broths, Fat, Bones, Head Cheese, Chicken Feet, Organs, & Kefir

More Tips on How to Eat All of This Stuff. -- I have become a soup master this year. I alternate between my milk based soups that include roots boiled in stock and pureed, and then added to milk for a cream soup, and hearty bean soups. For those root soups, beets, carrots, potatoes and rutabagas in any combination will make the rich base, particularly once pureed after cooking. Add in some milk and seasonings and you have a complete meal.

For bean soups, starting with a couple of cups of your favorite dry beans, soak them for 12 or so hours. Discard the liquid, rinse and then cook them (without salt) until tender in stock. Throw in your favorite head cheese, lard, meat, or what have you, and then some canned tomatoes, or whatever is in the root cellar or garden, depending on the time of year. Add greens and herbs at the last minute so they retain their food value. For this soup, I leave it on the wood stove all morning and add things in appropriate order.

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Other Resources – It is interesting that as I was writing this article two women drove up looking for good food to buy. The conversation quickly turned to the one woman’s health crisis with arthritis, allergies, asthma, etc. I sold them chicken, gave them some kefir starter, loaded them up with NOFA literature and resource materials and sent them on their way. We are in a health crisis right now, and GMO’s in everything are a major culprit. Besides the excellent resources mentioned above, the Weston A Price website is full of educational articles. Three other books I suggest are “The Gut and Psychology Syndrome” by Natasha Campbell-McBride, “Pottinger’s Cats” by Francis Pottinger, and “Nutrition and Physical Degeneration” by Weston A. Price himself.
Organic Harvest Festival

*Wednesday, September 25, 2013, 2:00-6:00 pm*

The Organic Harvest Festival has returned! Part of Natural Products Expo East, the Organic Harvest Festival tabletop event features an array of organic food, festivities and organic! The event showcases organic manufacturers, while providing an optimal networking opportunity for attendees and exhibitors alike. This free event provides a lively outdoor atmosphere with live music and libations.

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