New NOFA Summer Conference Keynote:
Jeffrey Smith
Plus some new 2012 pre-conferences!

by Mindy Harris, NOFA/Mass PR Coordinator

NOFA has recently made a change to the keynote lineup for the August 2012 Summer Conference. Unfortunately, seed-grower Frank Morton will be unable to attend. In his place, speaking on Saturday, August 11th, is Jeffrey Smith, Executive Director of the Institute for Responsible Technology. Jeffrey Smith is the leading consumer advocate promoting healthier non-GMO choices, and the author of the world’s bestselling and #1-rated book on the health dangers of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). His meticulous research documents how biotech companies continue to mislead legislators and safety officials to put the health of society at risk, and the environment in peril.

In addition to Smith’s Saturday evening keynote, he will be leading a Pre-Conference training called Fighting GMO’s: Training for Consumers, Community Leaders, Activists, and Organizers, on Thursday, August 9th, 1:00PM - 5:00PM and Friday, August 10th, 8:00AM - 12:00 Noon. Those interested in attending the training may pre-register at the www.NOFASummerConference.org website. The price is $65, but NOFA members get a $5 discount, those who register by July 10 get another $5 discount, and $30 scholarships (from a generous NOFA member) are available for those who cannot afford the full price. Last minute registration for the pre-conference will be possible on Thursday, August 9, from 11:30am - 1:30pm.

The pre-conference training will give attendees specific techniques on how to organize anti-GMO education and political activities. The training will include: How-to’s on the five components of a GMO presentation, resources and background on why genetically engineered foods are dangerous, instructions on how to customize PowerPoint slides (provided), and proven organizing techniques to motivate people. Graduates will be invited to join a GMO Speakers Bureau, participate in ongoing webinars, and join the network of active campaigners reclaiming a non-GMO food supply. For conference-goers who cannot come early, Smith will also be leading two regular conference workshops: Documented Health Risks of GE Foods at 10 am on Saturday, and Getting Organized for GMO Activism at 1 pm on Saturday.

Smith’s first book, Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies about the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You’re Eating, combines the art of storytelling and investigative reporting. His second book, Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods, is the authoritative work on GMO health dangers. It includes 65 health dangers, linking GMOs in our food to toxic and allergic reactions, infertility, and damage to virtually every internal organ studied in lab animals. The book summarizes why the safety assessments conducted by the FDA and regulators worldwide have been based on outdated science and false assumptions, and why GM foods must urgently become our nation’s top food safety priority. Former UK environment minister says the revelations in Genetic Roulette may “change the global course of events this century.” Smith has counseled leaders from every continent, campaigned to end the use of genetically engineered bovine growth hormone (rbGH or rbST), and influenced the first state laws in the United States regulating GMOs.

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Keynoter Jeffrey Smith will also run a 1 day pre-conference training on fighting GMOs...
The Natural Farmer

The Natural Farmer is a quarterly membership journal of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. 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:

- Fall 2012: Local Credit
- Winter 2012-13: Biodiversity & Organic Farms
- Spring 2013: Beginning Farmers

If you can help us on any of these topics, or have ideas for new ones, please get in touch. We need your ad copy one month before the publication date of each issue. The deadlines are:

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- April 30 for the Summer issue (mails Jun. 1)
- July 31 for the Fall issue (mails Sept. 1)
- October 31 for the Winter issue (mails Dec. 1)

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All Eyes Turn to California for Progress on GMOs

After the February dismissal of the Monsanto suit by Judge Naomi Buchwald in New York City, the Food and Drug Administration’s dismissive treatment in March of the Just Label It campaign’s one million signatures calling for GMO labeling, and the late April and early May collapse of legislative efforts to pass state labeling laws in Vermont and Connecticut, California’s GMO labeling initiative seems to be one of the few efforts keeping hopes alive for reasonable regulation of agricultural biotechnology. The Golden State effort has resulted in nearly one million signatures supporting placing the initiative on the ballot this fall. As of press date the signatures have not all been qualified, but organizers believe they have more than enough to survive challenges and force the issue of state-wide GMO labeling to be placed before voters in November. Although a similar measure went down to defeat in Oregon about 10 years ago after industry financed a multimillion dollar TV campaign, supporters believe that California represents a far stronger venue for such a campaign given the size of the state and the level of GMO organizing going on there.

source: personal Emails from GMO organizers

CCOF Tops List of Organic Certifiers

Figures released by the USDA place CCOF Certification Services as the largest certifier of organic products in the U.S. CCOF represents 2,321 certified operations domestically–13% of USDA organic certified operations. A list of operations certified by the National Organic Program (NOP) may be found at http://apps.ams.usda.gov/nop/. The list here is a compilation of the figures provided on the NOP website for the largest certifiers, organized by certifier and primary scope of certification.

source: USDA press release, March 20, 2012

U.S. Organic Market Surpasses $31 Billion in 2011

The U.S. organic industry grew by 9.5 percent overall in 2011 to reach $31.5 billion in sales. Of this, the organic food and beverage sector was valued at $29.22 billion, while the organic non-food sector reached $2.2 billion, according to findings from the Organic Trade Association’s (OTA’s) 2012 Organic Industry Survey. Overall organic product sales growth of 9.5 percent continued to outpace total sales of comparable conventionally produced food and non-food items, which experienced 4.7 percent growth. The organic food sector grew by $2.5 billion during 2011, with the fruit and vegetable cat-
many scientists say aimed at replicating how imidacloprid may have in situ study in Worcester County, Massachussetts, the June issue of the Bulletin of Insectology. is normally present in the environment.”

vard’s Department of Environmental Health, “Our pesticide to affect the bees,” says Alex Lu, associate cloprid and colony collapse disorder. of Public Health say their new research provides Imidacloprid, one of the most widely used neonicot

Disorder

may encourage the proliferation of dangerous infec
tions and imperil public health, a federal magistrate

for years garlic growers have watched the stem and

ond agricultural regulators to analyze potential problems food companies is taking legal action to force gov

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environmental impact statement on the dicamba and

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they monitored bees in four different bee yards; each yard had four hives treated with different levels of imidacloprid and each yard contained one un-treated ‘control’ hive. After 12 weeks of imidacloprid dosing, all the bees were alive. But after 23 weeks, 15 out of 16 of the imidacloprid-treated hives - 94% - had died. Those exposed to the high

levels of the pesticide died first. Lu says the study, published in the journal PLoS ONE on April 6, aimed at determining the role of the dead hives were consistent with CCD - the hives were empty except for food stores, some pollen, and young bees, with few dead bees nearby. When other conditions cause hive collapse, such as disease or pests, dead bees are typically found inside and outside the affected hives. “Strikingly,” said Lu, “it only took low levels of imidacloprid to cause hive collapse, less than that typically used in crops or in areas where bees forage.”

source: April 10 Harvard School of Public Health press release

Man Gets Two Years in Organic Food Scam

“You made a big mistake to commit this crime in Lane County,” the judge said in sentencing 55-year-old Harold Chase, a rural Springfield, OR, man, to more than two years in federal prison. Chase sold a local grain broker 4.2 million pounds of conventional corn he misrepresented as organic. U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken cited the long-running Lane County Farmers Market and strong local interest in pesticide-free foods as she imposed the 27-month sentence.

The sale followed an elaborate ruse Chase conducted between November 2009 and May 2010 to pass off the corn as organic. He used several aliases to buy approximately 2,253 tons of conventional corn from four grain suppliers in Idaho and Eastern Washington, then had the corn shipped to a local grain broker. Chase sold the corn for $263,000, but the actual value of the conventional corn was about $600,000. He used several aliases to buy approximately 2,253 tons of conventional corn from four grain suppliers in Idaho and Eastern Washington, then had the conventional corn delivered to “transloading sites” where it was placed on different trucks to further disguise its origins. The actual value of the conventional corn was about $600,000, but he received more than $450,000 for it, court documents show.

source: The Register-Guard of Eugene, Oregon, Apr 3, 2012

Farm Groups Seek US halt on ‘Dangerous’ Crop Chemicals

A coalition of more than 2,000 U.S. farmers and food companies is taking legal action to force govern

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NY Garlic Growers Still Struggling with Nematode Infestation

Four years garlic growers have watched the stem and bulb nematode spread into New York state from Ontario. It can devastate an entire crop. Primar

y moving with seed garlic, it also can migrate on the outside of skin and can remain viable in garlic fields. German Garlic Seed Foundation has been warning growers against selling any infested seed and urging rotation of fields out of susceptible production. Their website on new garlic uses to prevent disease even when the garlic fields. German Garlic Seed Foundation has been warning growers against selling any infested seed and urging rotation of fields out of susceptible production. Their website on new garlic uses to prevent disease even when the garlic fields. German Garlic Seed Foundation has been warning growers against selling any infested seed and urging rotation of fields out of susceptible production. Their website on new garlic uses to prevent disease even when the garlic


Vermont Challenged For Protecting Dairy Instead of Clean Water

Advocates have been pushing VermontLegislature and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the agency charged with assuring Vermont’s Water Quality Standards (WQS), and the...
Department of Environmental Conservation entered in an agreement to assign to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFM) the task of writing the Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAP) rules to bring agriculture into compliance with the Clean Water Act (CWA) as conventional dairy is responsible for 50-60% of pollution entering the waters of the state, mainly Lake Champlain. The Agriculture Department agreed and promulgated rules (1995) that were designed not to bring the state into compliance with its own WQS and CWA but to assure the conventional dairy industry that it would not be hindered by federal or state regulation. That it was VAAFM’s purpose to write such regulations can be inferred from the empirical data, which indicated that milk production for the period 1995-present has steadily increased while lake pollution from runoff is undiminished, and from the agency’s response to the empirical data, which was to issue a revision to the rules (2005) that changed some of the language of the AAPs but not their substance. Petitioners asked that the rules be brought up for review in order to bring the state into compliance with CWA, which mandates that the VAAFM “reduce the amount of pollutants from entering the lake.” (source: personal Email, March 6, 2012)

USDA Unveils New Plant Hardiness Zone Map
The US Dept. of Agriculture has released a new version of its Plant Hardiness Zone Map. It offers an interactive format and zone boundaries have shifted in many areas from the previous edition. It is available at www.planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/... (source: Organic Broadcaster, March-April, 2012)

Cheap Food in US
USDA data shows the average American spends 6.9% of his or her income on food, the lowest percentage in the world. The Irish spend 7.2%, the English 8.8%, Australians 10.5%, and Spanish and French families spend more than 13%, Most South Americans spend more than 20%, Mexicans 24%, and Chinese 33%. The highest amounts spent on food are in the Philippines 36.7%, Indonesia 43%, and Azerbaijan 46.9%. (source: The Germinator, Spring 2012)

So what happened to the Connecticut GMO-Labeling Bill?
by Kristiane Huber

CT NOFA is excited about the support HB 5117 received from concerned consumers, organic farmers, and legislators on both sides of the aisle. In the past few months we have had a press conference at the capitol with GMO-activist Jeffrey Smith, Connecticut’s U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal expressed his support for HB 5117 at an event hosted by Right to Know CT in April, and finally there was a good turnout at a rally in support of GMO-labeling at the Capitol on May 4.

Unfortunately HB 5117 was never called for a vote, and even if it had been, the bill would have been largely inconsequential due to the complete removal of the GMO-labeling provision in closed door meetings. Representative Richar Roy, the main sponsor of HB5117 said that “The labeling provision was eliminated from the bill due to fears that it opened the state up to a lawsuit. The attorneys for the leadership and Governor’s office felt that the Constitutional Rights of Monsanto gave them the power to successfully sue the state. Their main duty was to protect the welfare of the state.”

It is unclear if the Governor’s Office chose to interfere with the bill out of fear of a lawsuit or if the removal of section 2 was more of a deal struck with the biotech lobby. Whatever the reasoning, we are very disappointed that the GMO-Labeling bill was unable to go through the full legislative process.

Connecticut’s labeling movement continues. Right to Know Connecticut is continuing to have steering committee meetings to discuss strategies for education and activism in the coming years. This pro-labeling coalition seeks the support of other organizations including environmental, consumer rights, health organizations, towns and city councils, and faith groups.

You can still sign on to our GMO-activist list by e-mailing Kristiane@ctnofa.org.


CT NOFA’s GMO Update: http://www.ctnofa.org/GMO%20resource%5D0page.html

Why NOP Must Change Proposed Rule on Periodic Residue Testing

by Elizabeth Henderson

The National Organic Program (NOP) has published a Proposed Rule that will govern the residue testing that organic certifiers must perform. (Residue Testing Proposed Rule AMS–NOP–10–0102; NOP–10–10). This new Rule requires certifiers to perform mandatory residue testing on products from 5% of the farms and businesses that they certify. It has not yet been implemented and the NOP has yet to reveal the timetable for implementation. While appropriate testing is necessary to prevent fraud and uphold organic integrity, the NOP Rule as written fails to address many complex issues and places an undue burden on smaller certification programs like the NOFA-NY LLC.

Let’s look at the problems with this Rule.

First of all, the National Organic Program is a “process-based” set of standards that define methods of production. A mandatory product residue testing program as outlined in this rule comes perilously close to re-defining organic as a product claim. The Periodic Testing Rule does not make the purpose of the testing clear. Testing protocols would vary depending on whether the main goal is to avoid fraud or to evaluate contamination, whether intentional or inadvertent. While OFPA specifies “unavoidable residual environmental contamination,” in developing a testing protocol, there can really be no separation between this and other types of contamination until testing is done to verify the existence and nature of the contamination.

While a list of 188 pesticides to test for is available in a guidance document, it is unclear what other environmental contaminants might be tested for. The list does not include synthetic nitrogen fertilizers or antibiotics, nor glyphosate and other herbicides. Will this testing include GMOs? If GMO contamination is detected, what will be the consequences? The organic community is deeply divided on whether there should be GMO thresholds (the maximum percentage of GMO contamination allowed). This rule does not address whether a farmer will be held responsible for contamination beyond his/her control. A sensitive issue like this should be reviewed in an open public process through the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) which can solicit broad-based stakeholder comments in developing a testing plan.

The NOP has not consulted with producers from different sized operations whose production practices, record-keeping, and bottom line will be directly affected, or with consumers and the environmental community. The Senate report language, issued when the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) was passed, gave the role of advising the Secretary of Agriculture on residue testing to the (NOSB). The NOP should withdraw this Rule and turn the job over to the NOSB.

COSTS

By requiring that 5% of all operations be tested, the costs related to this rule are not scale neutral. Data from the Accredited Certification Agencies (ACA) showing that the NOP estimate that this testing regime reflects 1% of an ACA's operating budget is only accurate for the larger certifiers. It can range up to 11% for the smallest of certifiers. Larger certification programs can get volume discounts from labs on testing. State programs, like that in Washington State where Miles McEwvoy is director before moving to the NOP, have state-run labs. The smaller certifiers will have to pay more for tests, and as a consequence be forced to increase their certification fees. When a lab tests for a specified chemical, the cost is much lower than a fishing expedition for anything that might be present, so detailed guidance on what to test for is essential to making this program fair. The NOP could reduce the costs by contracting with laboratories for volume discounts on testing. Since OFPA does not specify that certifiers alone must pay for all residue testing; the NOP could share the fees as an enforcement expense.

Depending on how the 5% is determined, it could result in more product from small operations being tested under the Rule’s sampling regime leading to a disproportionately adverse affect on small to mid-sized operations. Contamination on large operations will be less likely to be uncovered.

The NOP needs to do more detailed economic analyses to address this serious cost issue as well as the proposal’s scale bias.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Related to the costs of testing is the consequence of such a mandated program on the other testing done by ACAs. The preamble to the Rule in the Federal Register is confusing, referring several times to the 5% requirement as “the entire random sample,” yet the word random is not used at all in the proposed Rule language.

If the Rule does indeed require that the entire 5% be random sampling, then it is possible that, given the extraordinary costs associated with testing, certifiers may not be able to do as much (or any) of their “investigative” testing that is based on risk assessment, but is not compliance testing (that required specifically by a complaint or other directed reason). This could result in less actual detection of contamination, since risk-based assessments that are targeted to considerations of the type and risk of each operation have more of a chance of finding contamination than random testing.

When I asked Sherrie Hastings, the Acting Director of the NOFA-NY LLC, for her reaction to this regulation, she answered: “As a certification agency we certainly do have concerns about the financial impact on certification agencies and ultimately the certified operations. We also feel that risk based testing is critical, random testing is also necessary, just to let folks know we are watching... however, the testing requirements could easily be a combination of the two.

In their comments, the ACA presented this sensible conclusion on the kinds of testing needed: “We believe that a more effective picture of the possible residues in organic production can be obtained through random and risk based testing, compliance testing, testing for genetic contamination and testing of plant tissue, soil, compost, inputs, water and feed. A requirement to test only finished goods will limit the ACAs ability (both financially and operationally) to continue risk based testing.”

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Small Changes Make Big Differences on the Ground

Testimony of Russell Libby, Executive Director, Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association before the Subcommittee on Nutrition and Horticulture, Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

Editors note: We reprint here the recent testimony of MOFGA director Russell Libby, long an organic advocate, to the Congressional House Agriculture Committee on the Farm Bill. In an accompanying Email Steve Eika, the lobbyist employed by the National Organic Coalition, had this to say:

“I was with Russell at the hearing today, and he did a great job. He particularly did well fielding a question from Congressman Crawford of Arkansas, who essentially made the argument that seeing that there is pressure in this Farm Bill to cut direct commodity payments to producers, then shouldn’t we be cutting direct payments to organic farmers through the certification cost share program too? Russell pointed out the program is capped at $750 per operation per year, and also said that it is more analogous to an NRCS cost share program than it is a direct commodity payment.”

Good morning, Chairwoman Schmidt and Honorable Members of the House Agriculture Committee. I am Russell Libby, Executive Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, or MOFGA. MOFGA is the largest state level organic organization in the country, with about 6500 member farms, businesses, and households. Formed in 1971, we started the country’s first state organic certification program in 1972, an apprenticeship program to match new farmers with experienced teachers in 1975, and hired the first organic ‘extension agent’ in 1986. We now have 26 employees who work on services to farmers, education, and outreach to the general public.

MOFGA’s annual harvest festival, the Common Ground Country Fair, draws 60,000 people each September to Unity, Maine, a town of 2400, making it the country’s largest organic food event.

Russell Libby with Maine Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, an ex-MOFGA staffer, who will be the keynote speaker at the 2012 NOFA Summer Conference

We also run a highly successful new farmer training program. Of the 140 program participants over the past 12 years, 87% are currently farming. Our USDA-accredited organic certification program includes about 5% of the farms in Maine, and about 20% of the dairy farmers.

MOFGA has been in business for 40 years, and in that time, we have witnessed tremendous growth in organic agriculture and in the opportunity for farmers to rebuild local economies through food production. Our farmers have built a robust direct-to-consumer marketing movement in Maine, with close to 150 farmers’ markets and several hundred farmers offering Community-Supported Agriculture programs that supply about 2% of the families in Maine with produce, summer and sometimes winter, and an increasing array of products. With a number of small investments and no-cost policy changes, the 2012 Farm Bill can facilitate this growth and opportunity.

We are a member of the National Organic Coalition, and work closely with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, so our Farm Bill priorities reflect theirs in many ways.

Horticulture Title: The Horticulture title of the Farm Bill is critically important for organic farmers. The National Organic Program does an increasingly good job of working through issues that confront organic food producers and processors around the country. The Specialty Crop Grants program is a long-overdue recognition of the needs of fruit and vegetable farmers from around the country.

Our suggestions:

1. Fund national organic certification cost-share at the level included in the Senate farm bill voted out of Committee. Organic agriculture is a strong and growing sector of American agriculture, and organic certification cost-share is an investment in business development for agriculture. Many organic farmers rely on the cost-share program to help them access markets (retailers, specialty food processors). The program also enables farmers to remain in the organic market by offsetting annual certification costs for farmers. Organic producers must meet strict organic standards to be certified, and the costs of certification are going up. As the requirements for the National Organic Program become more strictly defined, the time farmers spend in recordkeeping and compliance increases substantially. Without national organic certification cost-share, farmers here at home will opt not to certify, and organic companies will have to source organic product from overseas instead of from American farmers to meet strong consumer demand.

2. Encourage more organic farmer participation in critical conservation programs. The 2008 Farm Bill included important provisions in Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for organic farmers in recognition of the historical lack of participation and conservation benefits of these systems. However, both programs are in need of reform to address the unique needs of organic farming systems. Issues such as the unfamiliarity of NRCS staff with organic systems, overlapping planning requirements with the National Organic Program, and lack of adequate planning assistance should be addressed in the next Farm Bill. By the way, one of the places that we’ve been very successful in the past few years is getting our new

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The Natural Farmer Summer, 2012
young farmers to participate in NRCS programs, which helps to strengthen the base for that agency long into the future.

3. Help the National Organic Program (NOP) to be more effective. The National Organic Program enforces the national organic standards, accredits certifiers, develops equivalence agreements, handles complaints – in essence, NOP ensures the integrity of the organic seal. These are essential functions to the survival and growth of the organic sector. Additionally, the program requires a capital investment in innovative technologies that will position the program to be able to grow with the organic sector, providing domestic and international oversight, and transparency and streamlining of systems, data, and information. NOP should receive a one-time infusion of $5 million in mandatory funds for the technology upgrade, and then should be authorized to receive appropriations increasing at a rate of 20 percent annually beginning with $10 million in FY 2013.

Nutrition Title:
When things work right, the full range of USDA programs make a significant difference to farmers and the general public. Linking nutrition programs to access at farmers’ markets, expanding EBT programs, developing more opportunities for farmers to supply the school lunch program—all of these things make farmers more profitable.

The largest programs within the Farm Bill are embedded in the Nutrition Title. If farmers are not able to provide food through programs in the Nutrition Title for the people who need it the most, they are shut out of a major income stream. If the people who are eligible for nutrition assistance do not have access to fresh, local produce, they may not get the full nutritional benefits from the assistance they receive. Connecting farmers with consumers who participate in nutrition assistance can benefit producers and consumers.

How can you help this to happen?

1. Make it easier for farmers to access EBT programs. The range of marketing options has widened dramatically over the past decade, with farmers’ markets, CSAs, farmstands, buying clubs and other options. Please amend Section 7(b) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to treat wireless retail food vendors as fixed locations stores are now treated.

2. Increase the ability of school lunch programs to source directly from farmers who meet their standards by:
   a. Allowing flexibility in schools. Rather than requiring produce purchases through the DOD Fresh program, allow schools the option to use their DOD credit to purchase food directly from local farmers.
   b. Similarly, allow schools to use 15% of ‘commodity’ dollars to purchase locally available foods that in turn help to support their communities. This addresses a key tension in many rural communities. Farmers support their schools through property taxes, and in turn would like their schools to be able to support them through purchases.

Other programs important to the whole.

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program. Interest in direct markets is growing, and farmers innovate to supply more. The expanded Farmers Market Promotion Program continues to serve direct marketers, but also includes those farm businesses that are trying to develop farm to institution and food hub opportunities across the country. It deserves more funding: the $30 million proposed in the Local Foods, Farms and Jobs Act will only serve direct marketers, but also includes those farm businesses that are trying to develop farm to institution and food hub opportunities across the country. It deserves more funding: the $30 million proposed in the Local Foods, Farms and Jobs Act will only scratch the surface of the current interest. Every new market opened or expanded through the program provides more jobs and keeps money circulating in the many participating communities.

Seeds and breeds. I understand that the prevailing worldview is that the solutions for the future revolve around biotechnology, but I want to say a few words in favor of all purpose, traditional breeding. In the late 1800’s, farmers in my part of western Kennebec County, Maine, were deeply engaged in the refinement of the Hereford as a cattle breed suitable for the U.S. The dry bean varieties that work in our humid northeast climate were selected over long stretches of time by farmers, and then further refined by plant breeders at public universities. Even now farmers in New England benefit from plant breeding done at the University of New Hampshire by Brent Loy, who has developed melons and pumpkins that thrive in the northeast. In our rush to the cellular approach, I hope we don’t lose sight of the value of traditional plant breeding. The Seeds and Breeds provisions of the last Farm Bill were a good starting point, but we need the public plant breeders and the long-term commitment to make those varieties available.

Expanding Economic Opportunities, In conclusion, markets for farmers are changing rapidly. There are thousands of new farmers markets around the country and Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) are also rising in number. In Maine, the number of farmers markets has grown tenfold in the past 30 years, and CSAs now supply about two percent of Maine families. While this growth in direct producer-to-consumer marketing is exciting, there is a nearly untapped marketing opportunity at the wholesale, retail, and institutional level of sales. Through your actions with the Farm Bill, I hope we don’t lose sight of the value of traditional plant breeding. The Seeds and Breeds provisions of the last Farm Bill were a good starting point, but we need the public plant breeders and the long-term commitment to make those varieties available.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer questions.

Julie Rawson & Jack Kittredge
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Gaining (Inter)National Perspective at the Annual Acres U.S.A. Conference

by Derek Christianson

In December 2011, I joined a contingent of farmers from Massachusetts traveling to the Acres U.S.A. conference in Columbus, Ohio. This was my second time attending the conference and I found the experience to be well worth the investment of time and energy to travel beyond the northeast. The following is a sharing of my experience at the conference in Ohio.

Immediately upon arriving at the Annual Acres U.S.A. Conference one becomes aware of the amazing diversity within agriculture. While Carhartt’s still abound, the plain dress of the Amish and cowboy boots become equally if not more apparent. The diversity on display is reflective of the broad representation of agriculture at the conference. The audience ranges beyond Canadian grass fed beef producers, canola and soy bean growers from South Africa, grapefruit farmers from Florida, raw milk dairy producers from small Midwestern towns and truck farmers from Lancaster County. While attending the conference I am reminded of the different scales and scopes which color our agricultural landscape. The Acres U.S.A. event draws an eager audience; called to immerse themselves within this diversity; to share and learn from the decades and decades of agricultural experience, and ultimately seeking to improve their level of production.

In every way the conference succeeds in embracing the energy and wisdom presented in the monthly publication of the same name. Joel Salatin, the well known proprietor of Polyface Farm was in top form during his Friday evening keynote presentation where he shared insights from his recently published “The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer”. Among his keynote address brimming with one liners was a strong emphasis on the need to attract the best and the brightest toward agriculture. “I like farmers with white collar salaries” stated Salatin as he implored the agricultural community to include a focus on presentation noting the lack of sportcoats and ties in the audience. His observations of the gathering were accurate, including the assessment of the conference as the epicenter of the “Integrity food movement”.

At dinnertime, before the keynote addresses, conference goers are on their own, given time to explore the many surrounding restaurants serving downtown Columbus. Dinner offers another terrific opportunity to connect and share stories with fellow farmers. On Friday evening I found myself sharing a burger with David Runyon, a corn and soybean producer from Indiana who grows non-gmo crops on more than 800 acres. Spending time with David offered a window into larger acreage agriculture which we don’t often experience in the northeast and served as a reminder of the variety of producers which Acres U.S.A. serves in their publications and events.

For many conference attendees the expansive trade show is as much of a draw as the scheduled lectures, films and keynote addresses. Among the more than 80 booths you may find an eclectic mix of soil consultants, product manufacturers, vendors, and amendment dealers. From designers of compost post brewer to suppliers of kelp products, the trade show offers great opportunity to connect with passionate and knowledgeable business owners.

Drawings on the strength of one-on-one and small group conversation the trade show provides the best opportunities for targeted conversation directly relevant to your farm.

At the Pike-Agri Labs booth, Bob Pike is kept busy demonstrating their newest crop monitoring tool, a modestly priced chlorophyll meter. Although just recently placed on the market, Bob refers me questions about the applicability of the meter to a large acreage crop consultant from North Dakota who has been using chlorophyll meters for a number of years and now has reference points for major crops which assist him with making accurate yield predictions based on their chlorophyll level. The primary advantage the chlorophyll meter has over the commonly used refractometer in measuring crop performance is the ability of the chlorophyll meter to give accurate readings regardless of current weather conditions (i.e. levels of sunshine, time of day, etc.).

The Acres U.S.A. Conference brings leading minds within the Biological Agriculture field to a broad audience. The lecture halls at the conference are often filled to brim with more than 300 audience members. In her address, Dr. Jill Clapperton who recently left her position as a rhizosphere ecologist at the Agriculture and Agricentre in Alberta, Canada provided a strong case for diversifying cover crop plantings. She echoed felt sentiments of Karl Dafeld’s recommendation that growers sow a “cocktail of seeds” to maximize the benefit of cover crops.

Moving beyond traditional winter rye and hairy vetch to sowings of as many as 9 species for full-year fallow rotations allows growers to maximize diversity in the rhizosphere. I left the two lectures vowing to reassess the simple cover crop rotations employed on our farm; to reconsider how we can use cover crops to break the dominance of single

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species root zones present in traditional vegetable farming.

For conference goers seeking a more intimate, freestyle conversation, the Answer Spot and The Consulting Halls provide ample opportunity to dig deeper into ideas presented in the main lecture hall. Differing from the lecture format that targets large audiences; these rooms are dedicated to shorter, smaller sessions. The informal design of these groups enables answers to a rapid array of questions from all walks of agriculture. The Consulting Hall includes a focused presentation and follow up questions and answers, while the Answer Spot follows a completely free format allowing participants to pepper the presenters with their most pressing questions related to the presenters area of expertise.

Neil Kinsey, owner of Kinsey Ag. Labs, discussed his strategies for achieving healthy crops. Based on the work of William Albrecht; Kinsey delivers sound advice on the spectrum of minerals needed for improving yields and quality. One particularly insightful discussion highlighted the role of Manganese in crop nutrition and its interaction with iron within the soil system. While many consultants may emphasize providing Manganese by banding applications in the soil or through foliar sprays, Kinsey firmly believes the best approach is broadcast soil applications. “…Build the levels and feed the soil, so that the soil can feed the plant”. For farmers adhering to Kinsey’s soil tests; Neil recommends

EDUCATION, NUTRITION, NATURE
targeting 40 ppm of manganese in the soil, as long as the manganese is higher than your iron levels. For our soils in Southeastern Massachusetts which are routinely deficient in manganese, Kinsey’s advice served as a reminder of the work ahead aiming to achieve sufficiency levels of trace minerals in our fields.

On Saturday afternoon as we loaded the car and started our return journey east, we began to relay stories of the past few days; it was apparent that each of us on the trip enjoyed rather different experiences in Columbus. Drawn to different speakers and conversations depending on our natural proclivities, stage of life, and scope of production each of us succeeded in gathering new information to incorporate into our practices. The annual conference offers a tremendous opportunity to deepen your knowledge and tailor your experience depending on the information you are seeking.

In December of 2012, the annual Acres U.S.A. Conference will return to Louisville, Kentucky. Among the keynoters tapped for this year’s conference is

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It is infinitely important that agriculture should be . . . related to the social life.

— Rudolf Steiner

The Neighboring Food Co-op Association is more than 25 food co-ops in our region, locally owned by more than 90,000 people. From organic farming to local products, healthy food to fair trade, democratic ownership to community resilience, food co-ops build a better world. For more information, stop in at your local food co-op or visit www.nfca.coop/iyc.

photo courtesy Derek Christianson

Attendees browse the amazing array of books at the Acres U.S.A. conference.

Andre Leu, the current President of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements). Leu, who hails from Australia, has recently authored a two article series on Organic Nitrogen Management featured in the April and May issues of Acres U.S.A. this year.

Fred Walters, who succeeded his late father Charles Walters as the editor at Acres U.S.A. noted that as Acres celebrates its 40th year the organization is “Not just middle aged… but just hitting our stride”. Judged by the record number of attendees present at the 2011 conference in Columbus Fred could not be more right. Their annual gathering provides a terrific forum for engaging “eco-ag” leaders from throughout the country and was well worth the journey west.

Derek Christianson farms at Brix Bounty Farm in Dartmouth, Massachusetts and is a NOFA/Mass board member.

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The United Nations has declared 2012 The International Year of Co-operatives recognizing the contribution of co-ops to community resilience & food security.

The Neighboring Food Co-op Association is more than 25 food co-ops in our region, locally owned by more than 90,000 people. From organic farming to local products, healthy food to fair trade, democratic ownership to community resilience, food co-ops build a better world. For more information, stop in at your local food co-op or visit www.nfca.coop.
The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm: A Cultivator’s Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production
by Peg Schafer, forward by Steven Foster
published by Chelsea Green, VT, 2011, 324 pages, $34.95
review by Maria Noel Groves, Clinical Herbalist & Coordinator of the NOFA-NH Herbal Network

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm steps into relatively uncharted – but much-needed – territory, and I eagerly awaited Peg Schafer and Chelsea Green’s release of this book. I’ve sensed an increasing buzz on this topic in the last few years in my own community. Small herb businesses and collaborative organic farms have begun to test the waters growing Chinese herbs for market – a daunting task with little information available until now. Peg’s enlightening and informative how-to book brings us from seed to sale with approximately 80 of the most marketable Chinese herb crops that can be organically cultivated in the United States. Although the book is geared for small- and medium-scale organic farms, she adapts the information for backyard and permaculture gardens as well.

The interest in Asian herbs has skyrocketed since the Western world first began heavy use of them in the 1970s. For many decades, we were content to take imported herbs without even thinking to ask about where they came from, their quality, and if they were being ecologically (and organically) harvested. In the last decade or so another shift in consciousness has herbalists, acupuncturists, and consumers becoming aware of what raw materials suppliers probably knew all along: The vast majority of plants coming from Asia are of dwindling quality, contaminated with chemicals and metals, and/or over-harvested from an increasingly threatened wild population. Even “organic cultivation” of Asian herbs warrants skepticism in the same way that “China organic” produce has broken our trust. Horror stories include medicinal remedies dipped in lead filaments so they weigh more for sale, and the fact that 15 to 25 percent of all Asian medicinal plants are currently considered to be endangered in the wild.

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As a backyard gardener and herbalist, I look forward to putting “garden and polycultural planting” suggestions to use on some of my favorite Chinese medicinal species that I cultivate in my semi-forested “warm 4” zone – like codonopsis, astraga- lus, dogwood, peony, and schizandra – in addition to the Korean licorice mint, holy basil, ginkgo, ginseng, field mint, and Baikal skullcap that I already grow.

My own backyard won’t be sufficient to supply my clients and classes with the quantities of herbs I’d like (and my favorite national suppliers are frequently out of stock), and I anxiously await the northeastern farming community catching on to this trend with some of the most popular Asian herbs like gotu kola, holy basil, ashwagandha, astragalus, bacopa, codonopsis, lycii, jujube, and gingseng. If you begin to grow and sell these plants, please let me know! The individual and collective herbalists in the NH Herbal Network will gladly promote and purchase your herbs – email me at ahtha@nohan.org.

Maria has been working in the herb and natural products industry for more than 15 years. She is a former editor for Natural Health magazine and current editor and contributor for a variety of publications including Herb Quarterly, Remedies Magazine, and the NOFA-NH newsletter. Before beginning her herbal practice, Maria was a natural food store supplement/herb buyer and manager. She currently runs Wintergreen Botanicals herbal clinic and education center in Allentown, NH, and coordinates the NOFA-NH Herbal Network in her “spare time.” Visit www.WintergreenBotanicals.com and www.nofanh.org/herbs to learn more.

Grow Fruit Naturally: A Hands-on Guide to Luscious, Homegrown Fruit by Lee Reich

As readers of this journal know, I am a big fan of Lee Reich. His excellent workshops and publications give the learner not only what he or she needs to know when it is needed, but enough extra to understand the context and appreciate the larger whole. I have used illustrations from some of his books to grace my handouts when I give pruning workshops to know when it is needed, but enough extra to understand the context and appreciate the larger whole. I have used illustrations from some of his books to grace my handouts when I give pruning workshops.

Well, Lee (author of The Pruning Book and Landscaping with Fruit and Weedless Gardening and Uncommon Fruits for Every Garden among others) has done it again – another excellent book on home fruit production.

A lot of this information, of course, is also in his other books, but this one seems most appropriate to the home fruit grower – it focuses almost entirely on fruit rather than landscaping, it includes many common varieties as well as the “minor” fruit he is known for, and it covers all aspects of fruit production rather than specializing in the important art of pruning. Ideally the home fruit grower will over time acquire all Lee’s books. But this would be a good place to start.

Grow Fruit Naturally starts, naturally enough, with a discussion of planning your fruit garden. Such basics as available sunlight, soil, climate, microclimate, pollination issues, sizing and productivity are all covered. In a book of this nature, unfortunately, no topic can be fully explained and I found the section on picking tree size (2 pages) a little short for such an important decision when it comes to home fruit production. Many of the folks in workshops I have given on fruit tree have gotten standard size trees and found them increasingly difficult to work with as they grow to their natural height. They would have benefited a little more understanding of the strengths (and weaknesses) of purchasing dwarfer or semi-dwarfer plants.

One of Reich’s strengths, however, is his breadth of knowledge. In that first 12-page chapter on planning the fruit garden he touches on many topics and the reader would be well advised to see this as an introduction to relevant issues rather than a full explanation of each.

The following chapters in Part One focus on Planting and Growing, Pruning, Pests and Diseases (although not entirely organic, Reich tries mightily to use organic options wherever he can), and Harvesting and Storage. These are all well thought-out, although cursory by necessity. He allows himself 16 pages to cover the essentials of pruning, for instance, when in The Pruning Book he used 233!

Two-thirds of the book is devoted to Part Two: The Fruits. Lee has chapters on 31 separate fruits and berries, from such basic ones as apples, blueberries, grapes, peaches, pears, raspberries and strawberries to such uncommon ones as kiwifruit, medlars, pawpaws, persimmons, quince and shipovas.

Apples and grapes, deservedly, each get more pages than the others. And in the apple section he delves a little further into the mysteries of rootstocks and sizes. In each chapter, as well as expanding on the topics in Part One as applied to that particular fruit,
The Natural Farmer Summer, 2012

Since Berry wrote many of the essays in this anthology, food and the environment come through as primary themes. Food is a prolific source of controversy, and he succinctly captures the essence of what many people feel about it. In the introduction Pollan pays homage to Berry’s writing, which is celebratory, exploratory, expository, journalistic, analytical, critical, and reflective. He spent “many hours” visiting and writing with Berry about his farm and his innovations. He has come away with a deep appreciation for Berry’s writing, and I urge you to read it. This review is a summary of my take on the book. It should be noted that this is not a comprehensive review of every essay in the anthology. The review is based on my reading of the entire book and my own opinions about its contents.

The Unending Possibilities of“Food”

Bringing It To the Table: On Farming and Food
by Wendell Berry

Introduction by Michael Pollan.
review by Tracy Frisch

This topical selection of Wendell Berry writings (1971 - 2002) introduces one of our country’s foremost agrarian writers to the new wave of local and real food enthusiasts who may have missed out on his work. And his writing is not to be missed.

Wendell Berry is a 77-year-old social critic, essayist, novelist, poet, former college professor and farmer from Kentucky who has spent most of his career exploring cultural contributions of the family farming, decentralized communities and local homegrown economies, and traditional rural values. The prolific writer is perhaps best known for his book The Unrepentant Heart (1995--97) which inspired thousands of young people in that generation to seek meaning and connection as back-to-the-landers.

Whether through loving portraits of a farmer or farming community and beautifully constructed arguments, Berry has a master at delivering radical insights with deceptive simplicity. He is the quintessential critic of industrial agriculture – and the destruction of the cultural side of farming. Rather than counting the edges as our food system wrecks increasing havoc every which way, Berry likes to get right to the heart of the matter. This proclivity is unusual and important.

In his introduction Pollan pays homage to Berry’s pivotal influence in shaping his own perspective on agriculture. He seems the writer as an intellectual architect of our movement. Like Pollan, I feel indebted to Wendell Berry and count reading and reflecting on his essays as important formative experiences. Recently, I have drawn many of my core ideas about the correct relationship with soil and land, the productive process, work, and by extension, food and even one another.

I applaud the impulse to appeal to a new audience for Berry’s work that is certainly behind Bringing It to the Table. But I must wonder about its virtues compared to Berry’s own collections of essays published around the time that he wrote them. My favorite of these remains The Gift of the Good Land, which served as a focus for a small group I participated in with a group of faculty and grad students in West Virginia. This new collection includes some works from “Conversations with the Land” (1977) which I found immensely enjoyable.

The book opens with some delightful stories of how valuable food can be produced in the region. Irving built his farm on a steep hillside with only a few acres of land. He is able to grow a variety of vegetables and fruits that are otherwise difficult to grow in the region. He also grows a variety of herbs and spices that he uses in his cooking. The book provides a wealth of information on how to grow a variety of different crops in the region, including what to plant, when to plant, and how to care for the crops. It also includes recipes for some of the dishes that Irving prepares with the food he grows.

In “Her Land,” Jim contrasts the amazing response by those who get involved in farming and those who do not. He suggests that farming can be a way of life, and that it is important to make the decision to farm. He explains that farming is not just about growing crops, but also about taking care of the land and the people who live on it.

To achieve their own family, ecological and financial goals, the Vanders have been willing to keep rethinking and adjusting how they farm. This reflective attitude comes through in Jim’s essays. He has traveled an immense distance in his own thinking and practice from the conventional western Minnesota farm that he took over from his parents in 1998. He and his wife have reared not only their own land and their farm animals, but have also become very involved in the local and regional food systems. His farm is now a destination for local food enthusiasts, and he has become a leader in the local food movement.

While Fields Of Learning gives many positive pointers to how to make a student farm function more efficiently, it is still a work in progress. As one begins to start with is that there simply is a student farm movement. For those of us in the education business and those who are hopeful for a new generation of passionate farmers, it is a good news indeed. While academia abounds with cutting-edge technologies and business departments, it is deeply encouraging to know that our youth can be exposed to the rigor and rewards of a farming experience, as well as gleaning in other disciplines and studies. What a rich educational mix of experiences awaits undergraduates at these unique centers of education spread across the US.

Fields Of Learning is exciting proof that one can still learn farming as an undergraduate. The book offers the reader an ‘insiders’ look at the complex issues that administrators must struggle to keep the student farm going. It includes interviews with some of the most successful student farms in the country, as well as profiles of the students who participate in the farm. The book also includes a student reflection, which helps the reader get a deeper feel for the real outcomes, as students participate in this unique education experience.

Fields Of Learning helps us understand not only history, but also in-depth management issues and challenges of the academic farm setting. Faculty and students share case studies with the reader who gains an ‘insiders’ look at the complex issues that administrators must grapple with to keep the student farm going. It includes interviews with some of the most successful student farms in the country, as well as profiles of the students who participate in the farm. The book also includes a student reflection, which helps the reader get a deeper feel for the real outcomes, as students participate in this unique education experience.

An excellent resource for academics hoping to launch farm programs, or for those looking for the right fit for their grassroots education, Fields Of Learning helps readers consider what it takes to successfully launch such a program. It includes a detailed description of the student farm program at the University of Kentucky, which is an inspiration to many other programs. The book also includes case studies of other successful student farms, as well as interviews with students and faculty who have been involved in the program. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in starting a student farm, as well as for those who want to learn more about what it takes to successfully launch such a program.

Like farming itself, these profiled programs reflect the challenge to deliver a product that creates satisfaction for all outcomes while not compromising the values of a career which is based on adaptability, leadership, diversity and hard-won wisdom. In the words of Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell Uni-
The Natural Farmer

Summer, 2012

learning experiences for students. From studying promote "hands-on, inquiry-based STEM (Science, in the Garden
ence (MITS), a non-profit in Quincy, Mass., share with teachers.
me to review the 75 page booklet,
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Science in the Garden, Inquiry-Based Inves-
tigations for Uncovering the Science Taking Place in Your Schoolyard Garden
publisher: MITS, Inc., 1354 Hancock St., Quincy, MA 02169-5109 www.mits.org
Format: Three ring binder, 76 pages, 2011
review by Karen DiFranza

In my work, I am always looking for ways to help teachers integrate school gardens into their curricula. Science, math, social studies, reading, writing, art and music -- there isn't an area of study that does not find fertile ground for learning in the garden. But teachers are often overwhelmed by heavy work loads and pressure to prepare their students for state testing. Most would like to use school gardens as living laboratories for their lessons, but few have the time to invest.

So, when the folks at The Natural Farmer asked me to review the 75 page booklet, Science in the Garden, I looked forward to finding lessons I could share with teachers.

Published by the Museum Institute for Teaching Science (MITS), a non-profit in Quincy, Mass., Science in the Garden is one of their many publications that promote "hands-on, inquiry-based STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)". Each of the 23 lessons in this booklet offers hands-on learning experiences for students. From studying the greenhouse effect to exploring photosynthesis, each lesson encourages children in grades K-8 to participate in the activities, to ask questions and to discover the answers themselves, when possible.

Particularly valuable, I feel, were the activities in which the teacher asks a question and makes two lists on the chalkboard: one under "K" for "know" and one under "W" for want to know. Teams of students then choose two or three "want-to-know" questions from the list to investigate. For example, in one of my favorite lessons in the book, students investigate potatoes. In answering their self-generated questions about potatoes, they can choose from a table of materials that include a hand lens, tape measure or ruler and string, potatoes, balances and weights and a paring knife (to be used by the teacher). Students also have the opportunity to plant their potatoes in pots, observe their growth and report back later with answers to their questions.

In another lesson, students sprout and grow beans to study their roots. They change the position of a jar of sprouts, turning it on its side to see how this impacts root growth. When they transplant the beans to a pan, they plant them on one side, then water the plant-free soil on the other side to see what this does to the roots. Compared to some of the other investigations that had children creating models for what happens in nature, these experiences were an opportunity to observe a more organic, living process.

I'm not an expert on lesson plans. Generally, these plans seem pretty thorough and include good references and extended activities for the class or for students to pursue on their own. Most of the lessons also give alternative activities that are appropriate for different age groups. However, the lessons often omit what should or could result from the students' activities. It wasn't clear to me, for example, in the lesson on roots what would happen when you put finger paints into the plant's water as opposed to leaving water clear or putting a few drops of food coloring into it. Maybe this was intentional, but I think most teachers would appreciate knowing at least a range of results in advance. I also think that teachers would benefit if some of the projects had timelines for their completion.

My main objection to these inquiries is that they rarely get students outside the classroom. While I appreciate the value of hands-on in the classroom, this book is, after all, billed as Science in the Garden. In her "Letter from the Publisher", MITS president, Emily Wade says, "Welcome to the MITS handbook on understanding the lessons that can be learned from growing a garden whether in one pot or in one plot. To me there is nothing like mucking around with some soil and some seeds and then waiting for the miracle of the first green shoots." To me, mucking around with soil implies I'm in or on the soil. If you're like me, you will be disappointed to learn that several inquiries require using a pot, but only once takes place on a "plot". In the last lesson students explore the school yard for potential places that could be transformed into wildlife habitat, a fantastic investigation for every school.

In all fairness, the introduction does start by saying "This booklet is to help you develop an understanding of the science behind growing plants." But why not develop that understanding out in the garden, in the real world where there are insects, undigested organic matter in the soil, sun, wind and rain and a million other factors to discover that you won't find in a classroom setting? Why not stimulate our children with outdoor learning adventures to balance the seven hours of "screen time" the average American child spends each day? Why not give them the rare opportunity to discover their place in the natural world and help them understand through composting and gardening, eating the food they grow and celebrating that they are a part of the environment?

Of course, not every school has a garden, but many schools do, and many more should. Raised bed gardens, container gardens, rooftop gardens -- these and more are accessible even to urban schools. After this booklet’s introduction, we move on to a short article by a teacher in the Burlington (queen of school garden cities), VT schools encouraging school systems to fund garden educator positions, instead of relying on parent volunteers. I agree.

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Children need these experiences if they are going to be informed citizens of the world. School gardening should be part of the school curriculum, and school systems should finance them. When they do, publishers like MITS will consider creating lesson plans that actually use school gardens – giving students the empowering experiences that are missing from their lives and teachers the opportunity to nurture informed, engaged environmental stewards.

The material for this booklet was taken from the Science is Elementary series published by MITS, and it’s still worthy of attention from teachers who wish to offer hands-on classroom learning. The lessons certainly relate to gardening and give good background into plants, soil and water. However, next time MITS publishes a work on science in the garden, I hope the setting is a school garden where the opportunities for hands-on, inquiry-based investigations are endless and invaluable.

Karen DiFranza is founder of Hands to Earth, Educating for a Sustainable World.

The Real Dirt: Toward Food Sufficiency and Farm Sustainability in New England by John E. Carroll forewords by Mark B. Lapping and Matthew R. Simmons published by NH Agricultural Experiment Station, 135 pages, 2011, $15, soft cover illustrated and designed by Karen Busch Holman review by Jeff Hake

John Carroll’s The Real Dirt is his final installment in a trilogy of books on the state and the future of agriculture in New England. In this forward-thinking work, Carroll makes the case for local agriculture for its support of local economy, nutrition and taste, but also for its disaster insurance against diminishing global resources. He then proceeds to outline how far the growth of local agriculture has come so far in New England and, ultimately, to outline how far the growth of local agriculture can go if the region could just keep moving “the imperative of local food”. His most basic premise is that this region, once a bounteous land of farms and forest, is now precariously unprepared to fend for itself. Because “we must have oil before we can eat”, the limiting of this resource at any point could quickly hamper our food supply. Here Carroll chooses not only to lament our vulnerability, but note the larger issue: the availability of the “stored energy” of fossil fuels has given us unrealistic standards for our food production. He calls for a shift in the location of production, as well as larger lifestyle changes. And he harkens to writings of centuries past to recall a simpler way.

With this premise described, Carroll takes most of the rest of The Real Dirt to simultaneously call out examples of success in promoting local agriculture in New England and to make a call for action where he sees squandered opportunities. He begins with the town agricultural commissions (“AgComs”) that continue to emerge in New England, which he describes as a fusion of optimal government operation and the complex but imperative needs and benefits of a town’s agricultural community. He also notes the value of Food Policy Councils and similar organizations that create policy around food and agriculture even in municipalities where agriculture is a very minor activity. He leaves open-ended the other possible roles that AgComs and Food Policy Councils can play in local government.

Carroll then invokes the Victory Gardens and other less-heralded forms of personal and community food production to note the power that gardening has in creating food self-sufficiency. He also makes note of the work and writing of British writer and farmer John Seymour and uses that work to make the case for the backyard farmer. From there, Carroll transitions to a chapter dedicated to the myriad efforts taking place in Burlington, Vermont, “capital of the locavores”. Carroll draws the reader’s attention to the names and the projects of all of these “hidden” gems is certainly not hopeless. Carroll is indeed careful to offer glimmers of hope, citing examples of success in promoting local agriculture in New England and to make a call for action where he sees squandered opportunities. He begins with the town agricultural commissions (“AgComs”) that continue to emerge in New England, which he describes as a fusion of optimal government operation and the complex but imperative needs and benefits of a town’s agricultural community. He also notes the value of Food Policy Councils and similar organizations that create policy around food and agriculture even in municipalities where agriculture is a very minor activity. He leaves open-ended the other possible roles that AgComs and Food Policy Councils can play in local government.

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Carroll spends the remainder of the book describing in detail the “hidden gems of our land grants”, the state universities and farms charged with the roles of research, education and extension. This section of the book, however, is a bit less hopeful than previous parts. While Carroll sees great and varied opportunity inherent to these institutions, his disappointment in their lack of actualized potential is palpable. He takes the description of the land grant schools and their research farms state by state, describing the current infrastructure and activities and the ample potential he sees therein. His discussion of these “hidden” gems is certainly not hopeless. Carroll is indeed careful to offer glimmers of hope, citing examples of success in promoting local agriculture in New England and to make a call for action where he sees squandered opportunities. He begins with the town agricultural commissions (“AgComs”) that continue to emerge in New England, which he describes as a fusion of optimal government operation and the complex but imperative needs and benefits of a town’s agricultural community. He also notes the value of Food Policy Councils and similar organizations that create policy around food and agriculture even in municipalities where agriculture is a very minor activity. He leaves open-ended the other possible roles that AgComs and Food Policy Councils can play in local government.

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Carroll concludes with the assertion that New England’s food renaissance has already begun. Citing paired increases in production and demand and also agricultural innovation and the savvy of the average consumer, Carroll leaves the reader with a rosy picture of agriculture in New England tomorrow and the next year and decades to come. For the seasoned, and sometimes jaded, food systems professional in New England, The Real Dirt is a shot in the arm that perhaps one’s work is paying off and that one is not alone in the good struggle. And for the fresh-faced proponent of local food and agriculture for whom it would seem this book is most appropriate, Carroll’s work is a primer for understanding the ins and outs and ups and downs of New England’s complex and fascinating food system.
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Saturday, June 2: Low-Tech Organic Gardening With Chickens, Groton, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Monday, June 4th: Berry Production, East Falmouth, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Saturday, June 9: The Art of Gardening, Winchendon Springs, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Saturday, June 9: Chickens and the Sustainable Farm, Hatfield, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Saturday, June 9: Sustainability and Reality: Lessons Learned from Ten Years as Diversified Small-Scale Farmers, Lisbon, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Sunday, June 10: Organic Backyard Eggs, Northborough, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Sunday, June 10: Mycological Landscaping & Wild Mushroom Foray, Nelson, NH, for more info: Wiclandwoods.com or 603-762-0782

Wednesday, June 16: Bovine Social Club, White River Junction, VT, for more info: www.nofavlvt.org/upcoming-events-calendar or (802) 434-4122

Saturday, June 16: Organic Backyard Eggs, Northborough, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Sunday, June 17: Foliar Sprays and Crop Monitoring, Dartmouth, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Sunday, June 17: Make Hay While the Sun Shines: Working with Horses and Mules, Marathon, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Monday, June 18: Biological IPM Strategies, Pine Island, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Wednesday, June 20: Meat Markets and Halal Production, Norwich, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Saturday, June 23: An Integrated Crop & Livestock System for Soil Building, North Amherst, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Saturday, June 23: Block Parties! On the Farm, Ridgefield, CT, for more info: ctnofa.org or (203) 888 5146

Tuesday, June 26: Season Extension & Food Safety, Argyle, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Wednesday, June 27: Grazing Mixed Species: Complete Cycles and Proactive Protection, Walton, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Thursday, June 28: Value-Added Small Grains, Newfield, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Saturday, June 30: The Nose to Tail on Organic Pastured Pigs, Barre, MA, for more info: www.nofamass.org or 413-658-5374.

Saturday, June 30: A Unique Fruit CSA and U-Pick, Ithaca, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Sunday, July 1: Aquaponic Systems for Underused Spaces: Farming Fish and Vegetables in Tanks, Homer, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Sunday, July 8: Nibbling on the Landscape of the Granite State, Dorchester, NH, for more info: www.nofanhk.org/herbworkshops, nhhln@nofanhk.org or 603-224-5022

Monday, July 9: Farm Diversity with Heritage Poultry: The Joys and Challenges of Poultry and Pasture, Forestville, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Tuesday, July 10: Cornell Wheat Breeding Trials and a Revolutionary French Bread Event with Crown Point Breads, Willimantic, CT, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Thursday, July 12: Cornell Organic Wheat Variety Trials and Evaluations and an Ithaca Sunset, Freeville, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Monday, July 16: NOFA-NY Long Island Regional Meeting, Farm Tour, and Potluck, Huntington, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Tuesday, July 17: Sustainable Dairy Farm Management, Pavilion, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979


Sunday, July 22: Caring for the Whole Farm through Practical (and Potentially Profitable) Conservation, East Amherst, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Tuesday July 24: Small grains in the rotation, composting, dairy grain independence, and Food grade wheat, Falconer, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Friday, July 27: Small Scale Grain Production and a Cooperative Community in the North Country, Lafargeville, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Friday July 27 & Saturday, July 28: Hootenanny and Friends of the Farmer Festival, Copake, NY, for more info: www.friendsofhefarmer.com or 518-392-8545

Sunday, July 29: Herbal Picnic!, Candia, NH, for more info: Maria Noel Groves at nhhln@nofanhk.org or 603-340-5161

Monday, July 30: Micro Nutrient Balancing for Increased Production and Health in Dairy Cattle, Richfield Springs, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Thursday, August 2 – Sunday, August 5: National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, Burlington, VT, for more info: www.farmtocafeteriaconference.org or (802) 434-8411

Saturday, August 4: Reaping the Rewards of Experimentation and Innovation: Diversity-Based Farm Viability, Shelter Island, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Saturday, August 4: Pastured Poultry Workshop, Stonington, CT, for more info: ctnofa.org or (203) 888 5146

Sunday, August 5: The Symbiotic Farm: Managing Animals and Crops as an Agro-Ecosystem, Sherburne, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979

Thursday, August 9: Fencing Technologies and Techniques for a Diverse Farm with NOFA-NY’s 2012 Farmers of the Year, Preble, NY, for more info visit http://www.nofany.org/events/field-days or call (585) 271-1979
You may join NOFA by joining one of the seven state chapters. Contact the person listed below for your state. Dues, which help pay for the important work of the organization, vary from chapter to chapter. Unless noted, membership includes a subscription to The Natural Farmer.

Give a NOFA Membership! Send dues for a friend or relative to his or her state chapter and give a membership in one of the most active grassroots organizations in the state.

**Connecticut:** Individual $35, Family $50, Business/Institution $100, Supporting $150, Student/Senior $25, Working $20

Contact: CT NOFA, Box 164, Stevenson, CT 06491, (203)-888-5146, or email: ctnofa@ctnofa.org or join on the web at www.ctnofa.org

**Massachusetts:** Low-Income $25, Individual $40, Family/Farm/Organization $50, Large Farm/Business $75, Premier Business $125, Supporting $250, Lifetime $1,000

Contact: NOFA/Mass, 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005, (978)-355-2853, or rebecca@nofamass.org or join on the web at www.nofamass.org

**New Hampshire:** NH Basic $25*, Individual/ Couple: $35, Family/Farm: $75, Business/ Organization: $150, Supporting: $250, Sustaining: $1,000

Contact: NOFA-NH, 4 Park Street, Suite 208, Concord, NH 03301, Ph: (603)-224-5022,

Fax: (603)-228-6492, email: info@nofanh.org, website: www.nofanh.org

**New Jersey:** Student/Intern $20*, Individual $40*, Family/Farm $70*, Business/ Organization $150*, $10 additional per year for subscription to “The Natural Farmer”

Contact: NOFA-NJ, 334 River Road, Hillsborough, NJ 08844, Phone: (908)-371-1111, Email: nofainfo@nofanj.org, or join online at: www.nofanj.org

**New York:** Green Membership $20*, Brooklyn Special $40 (in conjunction with Brooklyn Food Coalition), Gardener/Consumer $40, Family/Farm $60, Nonprofit Organization $75, Business $125, Lifetime Individual $1,000, Lifetime Farm $1,500, Lifetime Business $3000

Contact: NOFA-NY, 249 Highland Ave., Rochester, NY 14620, Voice (585)-271-1979, Fax: (585)-271-7166, Email: membership@nofany.org, www.nofany.org

**Rhode Island:** Student/Senior: $25, Individual: $25, Family $35, Business $50

Contact: Membership, NOFA RI, c/o Dan Lawton, 247 Evans Road, Chepachet, RI 02814, (401)-525-2653, nofair@live.com

**Vermont:** Individual $30, Farm/Family $40, Business $50, Sponsor $100, Sustainer $250, Basic $15-25*

Contact: NOFA-VT, PO Box 697, Richmond, VT 05477, (802) 434-4122, info@nofavt.org

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