I know – the summer seems so far away. But with winter almost here (this was written late October), the thoughts of summer are not such a bad thing to keep us warm – in thought, anyway.

Mark your calendars for August 10-12, 2007 at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass. NOFA’s 33rd Annual Summer Conference will be another wonderful event. Why do people keep coming back? Is it the workshop offerings – over 200 for the weekend - feeding your mind for more on organic farming, or is it a course on gardening, natural healing, taking care of fruit trees, animal care, etc. Or maybe it’s the camaraderie of all of us gathering in one “weekend village”, sharing our lives for a day, or a time, or a moment. Perhaps it’s the wholesome food that nourishes our body/soul. We can feel when something is good. Or maybe it’s the kick-up-our-heels dancing time at night. Or perhaps a moment in the summer when we can all gather and share our thoughts, hopes and dreams for a future, a better way. We know when it’s right. We can feel it in our hearts and our minds. Deep down, there is a future that is good, and we hope to create it or nourish your thoughts in that direction.

This year, the NOFA Summer Conference will continue to offer so much, for all of us. As we all examine our choices for how we live on this earth, the NOFA Summer Conference offers us more concrete information on how, for example, to grow our own food naturally, organically. Or perhaps a workshop on herbs will guide us how to harvest and use plants medicinally. Another might teach us to take better care of our farm animals. Or a child may learn a skill previously unknown, such as felting or paper-making. Sometimes just a smile from someone might make your day.

The success of the NOFA Summer Conference depends in large part on the participation of the community. We are currently looking for workshop presenters, and media and advertising contacts.

We are looking for knowledgeable and enthusiastic presenters to offer workshops in a wide variety of categories, from beginner level to advanced. The categories include: Animals, Crops, Farming and the Community, Farm Economics and Management, Food and Family, Food Safety, Politics and Policy, Fruits and Vegetables, Gardening, Health, Heritage Breeds, International, Marketing, Organics, Partnership, Policy, Sustainability, Teaching, Traditions, Urban, and more.

The NOFA Summer Conference will feature over 200 workshops and topics, including workshops on heritage breeds, organic biocontrol, natural pest management, rare varieties, organic market gardening, organic livestock, organic fruits and vegetables, organic home canning, and much more. The NOFA Summer Conference is for all of us who are interested in some aspect of agriculture, farming, gardening, sustainability, nutrition, and a natural lifestyle. So much is offered during the course of the weekend, not only for adults, but also for teenagers and children, that it baffles the mind which workshop to choose, or film to view, at any given time.

NOFA Goes to Washington: Oct 06 NOSB Meeting Report

by Steve Gilman, NOFA Interstate Council Policy Coordinator 10/31/06

If nothing else, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) public hearing was a lesson in the deeper realities of Civics 101 -- where grassroots democracy and industry interests meet the power of government and the safeguard of rules and regulations. With the much anticipated pasture ruling still uncompleted by the National Organic Program (NOP) staff, the meeting featured arcane discussions on such items as determining aquaculture standards, defining agricultural vs. non-agricultural substances, developing sunset provisions for food colors, formulating pathogen-free compost tea requirements and deciding how to go about using expiration dates on certification certificates. The comments, petitions and discussions made it clear, however, that the highly deliberative process that was built into the rules and regs from the beginning (in OFPA, the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act) is doing a vital job keeping the integrity of organic standards intact.

At this meeting nearly a hundred people were packed into a windowless conference room on the outskirts of Washington D.C. for 4 days in October to conduct the nation’s official organic business. Up front were 14 out of the 15 NOSB members seated at tables arranged in an open horseshoe. A podium and microphone for recording testimony was set up dead center before them. Off to the left were an array of officials of the NOP led by Mark Bradley, Associate Deputy Administrator and Barbara Robinson from the Transportation and Marketing Program of USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service, administrator of the organic program.

There was a wide range of attendees. Some twenty percent wore suits – business types mostly, along with a handful of lawyers hired to represent them. Organic Trade Association officials were also in this category, including the new Director, Caren Wilcox. Former OTA

continued on page 39

Kids scramble to fund poeannuts in haystack at the 2006 NOFA Summer Conference
Globalization and Agriculture

by Jack Kittredge

Innovations in transportation have been driving changes in the face of farming for a long time. Early colonists in North America developed farms first on plots reachable by river or coastal ships. With the advent of canals in the early 19th century, the vast agricultural potential of western New York and the upper Midwest was tapped, bringing precipitous declines in commodity prices along the eastern seaboard and resulting in large scale abandonment of marginal farms in New England. The railroad in the latter part of that century opened up the lower Midwest and the Great Plains, once again ratcheting up the size of an acceptable spread.

Refrigerated rail cars in the early part of the 20th century brought fresh produce from California to eastern cities for a previously unthinkable long season. Sea-going methods of delaying ripening introduced tropical produce to our shores, and free trade in rice ushered in a winter cornucopia from the southern hemisphere.

Each time the effective distance between farm and table has shortened, small farms have seen their local markets seduced by the lower prices, wider selection, and longer season of larger, more distant operations. In our generation we have seen the ultimate conclusion of this process as now any product grown virtually anywhere in the world is available for purchase anywhere else in the world.

Upcoming Issue Topics - We plan a year in advance so that folks who want to write on a topic can have a lot of lead time. The next 3 issues will be:

- Spring 2007 - Water and Agriculture
- Summer 2007 - Organic Mining
- Fall 2007 - Global Warming and Agriculture

Moving or missed an issue? The Natural Farmer will not publish reprints or back issues. If you moved or didn’t get the paper, your beef is with your state chapter, not us. Every issue we print an updated list of “NOFA Contact People” on the last page, for a handy reference to all the chapter names and addresses.

As a membership paper, we count on you for articles, art and graphics, news and interviews, photos on rural or organic themes, ads, letters, etc. Almost everybody has a special talent or knows someone who does. If you can’t write, find someone who can to interview you. We’d like to keep the paper lively and interesting to members, and we need your help to do it.

David Ricardo and his friends of two hundred years ago would have rejoiced at this result. His theory of comparative advantage predicted that such widened access to markets would result in broad benefits as each country produced what it was best at, and freely traded with others for what those others could best produce. So much for theories.

This issue of The Natural Farmer is an attempt to look at what has happened to agriculture in this time of global trade. Not only do foreign foods become staple parts of our diet, our products do the same elsewhere. What is the impact of our cheap corn on farmers in Mexico? How has the spread of McDonalds influenced the rainforests and biodiversity? Does it still make sense for Africans to raise poultry locally when it is cheaper to bring it in from China? How do giant agribusinesses maintain their dominance? Are there models which small farmers can use to survive and preserve their independence? Does taste and artisanship have a role in food any longer? In the final analysis are we better off, healthier, more secure as a result of global agriculture? Or is there a dark side to it that threatens our economy, our values, even our personal security?

While we cannot obviously treat such a large subject adequately in one issue, we hope that this stimulates your curiosity about the impact globalization has made upon our world.

The Natural Farmer

The Natural Farmer is the newspaper of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). In most chapters, regular members receive a subscription as part of their dues, and others may subscribe for $10 (in the US or $18 outside the US). It is published four times a year at 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005. The editors are Jack Kittredge and Luke Raison, but none of the content is either written by members or summarized by us from information people send us.

Advertise in or Sponsor The Natural Farmer

Advertisements not only bring in TNF revenue, which means less must come from membership dues, they also make a paper interesting and helpful to those looking for specific goods or services. We carry 2 kinds of ads:

- The NOFA Exchange - this is a free bulletin board service for NOFA members and TNF subscribers for occasional needs or offerings. Send in up to 100 words and we’ll print it in the next issue. Include a price (if selling) and an address. E-mail or phone number so readers can contact you directly. If you’re not a NOFA member, you can still send in an ad - just send $3 along too! Send NOFA Exchange ads directly to The Natural Farmer, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or (preferably) E-mail to Jack@nofa.net.

- Display Ads - this is for those offering products or services on a regular basis! You can get real attention with display ads. Send camera ready copy to Dan Rosenberg, PO Box 40, Montague, MA 01351 (413) 863-9063 and enclose a check for the appropriate size. The sizes and rates are:

  - Full page (15” tall by 10” wide) $300
  - Half page (7 1/2” tall by 10” wide) $155
  - One-third page (7 1/2” tall by 6 1/2” wide) $105
  - One-quarter page (7 1/2” tall by 3 3/4” wide) $80
  - One-sixth page (7 1/2” tall by 3 1/8” wide) or (3 3/4” tall by 6 1/2” wide) $55
  - Business card size (1 1/2” tall by 3 8/10” wide) $15

  Frequency discounts: if you buy space in several issues you can qualify for substantial discounts off these rates. Pay for two consecutive issues and get 10% off each, pay for 3 and get 20% off, or pay for 4 and get 25% off. An ad in the NOFA Summer Conference Program Book counts as a TNF ad for purposes of this discount.

Deadlines: We need your ad copy one month before the publication date of each issue. The deadlines are:

- January 31 for the Spring issue (mails Mar. 1)
- April 30 for the Summer issue (mails Jun. 1)
- July 31 for the Fall issue (mails Sep. 1)
- October 31 for the Winter issue (mails Dec. 1)

Disclaimer: Advertisers are helping support the paper so please support them. We cannot investigate the claims of advertisers, of course, so please exercise due caution when considering any product or service. If you learn of any misrepresentation in one of our ads please inform us and we will take appropriate action. We don’t want ads that mislead.

Sponsorships: Individuals or organizations wishing to sponsor The Natural Farmer may do so with a payment of $200 for one year (4 issues). In return, we will thank the sponsor in a special area of page 3 of each issue, and feature the sponsor’s logo or other small insignia.

Contact for Display Ads or Sponsorships: Send display ads or sponsorships with payment to our advertising manager Dan Rosenberg, PO Box 40, Montague, MA 01351. If you have questions, or want to reserve space, contact Dan at (413) 863-9063 or dan@realpickles.com.
Please help us thank these Friends of Organic Farming for their generous support!

New from the 2006 NOFA Summer Conference:

0601 Climate Change, Ag & Energy    Vern Grubinger
0602 My Weedless Garden    Lee Reich
0603 Keynote Talk    Sr. Miriam MacGillis
0604 Farm Pond Aquaculture    Craig Hollingsworth
0605 Drip Irrigation for Gardens    Lee Reich
0605 Growing Fall Brassicas    Nancy Hanson
0607 National Animal Identification Debate    David Fisher
0608 Cover Cropping    Ryan Volland
0609 Organic Veggie Farm Systems    Bess Dicklow
0610 Vegetable & Flower Diseases

for a full list of the 146 videos available, visit www.nofa.org/conference/video/index.php

$15 each

Please send me the circled videos. I enclose $15 for each in the form of a check to “NOFA Video Project
NOFA Video Project, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005

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Kim G. Matland
In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Henry David Thoreau
Blow Your Own Horn!

Learn to Farm: Three apprenticeships available on certified organic vegetable farm in western CT for 2007 season, April through mid November. Help plant, cultivate, harvest, and market produce through a 300 share CSA and farmers market. Opportunity to learn the agricultural and business skills you will need to run your own farm. Compensation includes private room in apprentice house, farm produce, $800 monthly stipend plus scheduled raise and year end bonus. Send letter and resume to Paul Bucciaglia, Fort Hill Farm, 18 Fort Hill Rd., New Milford, CT 06776, www.forthillfarm.com.

Land for Rent. Land available in Brattleboro, VT, to rent for the 2007 season and beyond. Contact the owner at b.marianne@gmail.com for more details.

400 plus organic west coast raspberry plants in pots and 25 black raspberry plants in pots. Will fill a 2000 sq ft greenhouse. $1200 for all. contact andy at adapollonio@charter.net or call 860-742-5717.

Do you like playing in the dirt? Windy Willow Farm is looking for friendly, hardworking and motivated interns for the 2007 season. We are located in eastern Fulton County, NY and are an all-natural farm. We grow approximately 2 acres of vegetables and fruits; pasture lambs, pigs and laying hens. We direct market all of our products at local farmers’ markets and a growing CSA. Come join us, enjoy great food, and learn about sustainable farming and direct marketing. We offer a stipend, but housing is not available. Please contact us for more information: (518) 627-0476.


Small Flower Farm Seeking Field Manager. Looking for an experienced intern (with at least 2 seasons of organic farming) or a field manager. We are a small flower farm (1-acre) in western Massachusetts selling to neighboring CSA and local venues. Come join us, enjoy great food, and learn about small-scale flower farming. Housing in gorgeous yurt overlooking South River. Arrangements and compensation negotiable. Call Leslie Chaison at 413-369-4020 or email at lesliechaison@hotmail.com.

Piglets for sale. Yorkshire piglets for sale from the Natick Community Organic Farm. Available the 1st of April. Organically fed and raised. $65 per pig. If interested please contact the Farm at 508-655-2204 or email ncorganic@verizon.net.

Attention Small Growers without greenhouse space: The Natick Community Organic Farm, Baystate Organic Certified, will grow your seeds in our solar greenhouses for you. Seeds and quantities to us by February 1st for pick up in early May. Annual flowers and vegetables grown for 25 cents per plant. Contact Lynda Simkins at 508-655-2204 or Jed Beach at jbeach.ncorganic@verizon.net

Assistant Farm Manager - for 2 + acres certified organic farm, which serves as a therapeutic and vocational training site for homeless men and women. Assist farm manager in all aspects of seedling and crop production, local sales, and supervision of client workers. 25 week position, from mid-April through mid-October. Previous experience in agriculture needed and working with special needs populations preferred. $565 per week salary. Valid drivers license. Send resume and cover letter to: Jean-Claude Bourrut, Long Island Shelter, P.O. Box 220648, Boston, MA 02122. 617-534-2526 x304. jcbourrut@bphc.org

Brewster on Orleans Line, 4BR 2BA contemporary farmhouse, very unique property situated on 3.2 acres previously used for organic farming. Has separate barn / garage ready for horses, goats, women. Assist farm manager in all aspects of seedling and crop production, local sales, and supervision of client workers. 25 week position, from mid-April through mid-October. Previous experience in agriculture needed and working with special needs populations preferred. $565 per week salary. Valid drivers license. Send resume and cover letter to: Jean-Claude Bourrut, Long Island Shelter, P.O. Box 220648, Boston, MA 02122. 617-534-2526 x304. jcbourrut@bphc.org

Volunteer Farm-learning opportunity wanted. Location: approximately 1.5-2.5 hours from Monmouth County, NJ. Why: Interested in learning about farming before buying a farmette. When: Weekends. What: Special projects and/or routine farm chores. Who: Horses, goats, sheep, rabbits, llamas/alpacas, chickens, pigs, organic vegetables. Please Contact: Aprilspring@hotmail.com

Complete Maple Syrup System. Stainless steel evaporator, large stove, and three 100 gallon storage tubs. $5000 or bo. Contact Dan at 978 399 3195.
Conced Ma.

Farm Assistant for expanding CSA on Belmont/ Cambridge line, three miles from Boston. Assist with crop planning, greenhouse management, transplanting, cultivating, harvesting, weed and pest management. Educational opportunities include participation in CRAFT, selected NOFA practical skills workshops and working visits to other farms in the region. Preference given to applicants with interest in pursuing a career in farming and previous experience in organic vegetable production. Part-time, April through October 2007. $200/week stipend, farm produce. Farm is accessible by bike and public transportation. Letter of interest to GrettaAnderson@earthlink.net or CSA in Belmont, P.O. Box 533, Belmont, MA 02474.

NH Farm For Sale 35 Miles To Boston. Pelham, NH (just over MA border) 13 fenced, level acres fields & trees, spring-fed swimming pond, fruit barns, orchard, garden, and house; 2-story white Cape, 3 bedrm, 2 bath, 2500 sq ft. Borders town conservation land with trails. Great access to markets: we sell out on everything we raise (see website www.owensfarm.com). 10 minutes to Hwy 93, (major commuter route, widening soon) Locally famous for direct-marketed meat & milk, kids’ Sheep Camp. So why are we leaving? To farm in PA. Listed at $646,900. (603) 635-8553, daowens@erols.com

Seeking 2 apprentices for 2007 veggie season. Old Shaw Farm is a family run certified organic vegetable farm in beautiful Peacham, Vermont. This apprenticeship is structured for someone who is seriously considering organic vegetable farming as a career. Apprentices will be given significant instruction and responsibility for the operation of the farm, as well as significant time to pursue educational opportunities. We also have a lot of fun around here. To learn more about us, and the apprenticeship opportunities for 2007, go to our blog at www.oldshawfarm.com, or email us at apprentice@oldshawfarm.com or call us at (802) 592-3349.

Certified Organic Pork and Lamb for sale. The pigs are Certified Organic, raised on Certified Organic grain and hay with access to pasture. Our lambs are only fed Certified Organic Pasture and hay. No grain is used at all. A USDA slaughterhouse is used for processing. Please call for prices and availability. 978-875-2849. We are a working farm so please no calls after 9 PM. Or you can email us at stephensfarmnj@aol.com and in the subject line please write PORK or LAMB.

Celli Spader for Sale. NX30 4’ $2500. Also have a mechanical transplanter for $500 or bo and a Long rototiller for free. Near New Hope, PA. Contact Jon at (215) 598-1519. email talyon@juno.com

Seeking apprentices for new family farm. 15-20 acres of transitioning-fields-to-organic production, plus 25 acres of cover crops; marketed through CSA, wholesale & markets. Grow with experienced & energetic farmers - lots to learn and be a part of with start-up operation. Start February or March, through November. Monthly stipend $700, shared housing provided, experienced preference. Located in Connecticut River valley, 20 minutes from Brattleboro VT, 20 minutes from Greenfield MA, and 30 minutes from Keene NH. Contact Jenny and Bruce at Picadilly Farm, 264 South Paren Rd, Winchester, NH 03470. 603-239-8718. jenny@picadillyfarm.com

Ever wondered (or wanted a convenient way to explain to your customers) what farmers do in January? What local produce is available in May? Now’s your chance to find out! The 2007 New England Community Organic Farm calendar chronicles the activities of a small New England organic farm season by season. Each month features an original oil painting capturing the season, a brief description of the Farm’s activities, and a list of the food products available. These calendars make great tools for teaching the viability of local agriculture. For more information, visit www.naterrickfarm.org or call 508-655-2204; individual and bulk sales available.

Community organic dairy farm in Simsbury, CT working with a non-profit organization seeks an assistant farm manager with opportunity to take over the business. Highly-experienced dairy farmer and milk processor is willing to teach future farm manager. There are 70+ acres with 15 cows and milk-processing facilities and retail store on site. 4-bedroom apartment available on-site. Seeking someone immediately. Contact Bill Walsh at 860-658-5362 leave contact info and best time to call. Or email a resume to TownFarmDairy1@aol.com . Also visit www.townfarmdairy.org.

Red Fire Farm, a certified organic produce farm and CSA, has three apprentice positions open for the 2007 season. Ideal candidates should have at least a little bit of prior experience with vegetable gardening or farming. Apprentices learn how to farm vegetables and berries in an efficient and profitable way at the 20-acre scale. Interest in operating tractors and other farming equipment is required as is participation in the CRAFT farm-training program. Compensation includes housing, stipend ($700 per month), produce, and health insurance. More info, contact Ryan at 413-467-7645 or redfirefarm@gmail.com.

- Dairy quality organic baleage, round 4 X 5 bales, $35 to $55, New York-Pennsylvania border, 607-699-7098

- 3 double paneled window panels, 45 inches by 7 inches, free if you come and take the heavy things. Ted Conna, Westbrook, MA 03470-366-7067

- Apprentice/Intern sought for 2007 season. Long hours, short pay, good food, and lots of learning, from soil to seed to sale. Position open from mid-April to mid-October. Prefer non-tobacco user with drivers license. Work can be hard and in varying weather, but has variety in its tasks. Room, board and a small stipend. Contact Wayne at Wayne’s Organic Garden, PO Box 154, Oneco, CT 06373 or call (860) 564-7987

- Executive Director, Northeast Organic Farming Association of NJ - NOFA-NJ is looking for a dynamic leader to help further our mission of strengthening local organic and sustainable farming and food systems. Exciting new opportunities await as NOFA grows with a special focus on our new Center for Working Lands and NJ Agricultural Incubator. Full time, competitive salary, benefits. See www.nofanj.org for complete job description, or contact NOFA-NJ Search Committee c/o employment@nofanj.org Closing date for applicants is January 31, 2007 or until position is filled.

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News Notes
compiled by Jack Kittredge

FAO Shows Interest in Agri Ag for Food Security
The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) plans to hold a 2007 international conference on organic agriculture and food security. The conference aims to identify organic agriculture’s potential and limits regarding the food security challenge, including conditions required for its success in solving that challenge. The report of the conference will be submitted to the 2007 Session of the Committee on World Food Security.

source: http://www.gmwatch.org/archive2.asp?arcid=7222

Rethinking Food Safety
—The food supply chain in America is said to be one of the safest in the world. Perhaps because of this, far too many food manufacturers, marketers, retailers, restaurateurs, and consumers take food safety for granted...that is until a food-related illness affects them personally. Yet, in spite of all the precautions, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that more than 76 million Americans get sick and 5,000 people die from food-borne illnesses each year.


Ex-FDA chief to plead guilty
Former FDA chief Lester Crawford will plead guilty for failing to disclose a financial interest in companies his agency regulated, his lawyer said. Crawford is charged with failing to disclose his income from exercising stock options in companies he regulated...that is until a food-related illness affects them personally. Yet, in spite of all the precautions, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that more than 76 million Americans get sick and 5,000 people die from food-borne illnesses each year.

source: Toronto Globe and Mail, October 12, 2006

Scientists Find Link Between Breast Cancer and Farm Work
A team of researchers who studied the occupations of nearly all the Windsor, Ontario women who developed breast cancer in a period from 2000 to 2002 found they were about three times more likely to have worked on farms than women who didn’t have the disease. Although the researchers didn’t determine what these risks were, they speculated about pesticides, many of which are able to mimic or block the normal functioning of estrogen and other hormones. “If you were going to hypothesize about the No. 1 most likely cause of this elevated risk, I think you’d have to look at the whole chemical exposure that exists on farms,” said Jim Brophy, head of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers in Sarnia, and lead author of the paper.

source: Toronto Globe and Mail, October 12, 2006

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Lettuce Recalled Over E. Coli Concerns
Less than a week after the Food and Drug Administration lifted its warning on fresh spinach grown in California’s Salinas Valley, a popular brand of lettuce grown there was recalled over concerns about E. coli. Executives ordered the recall after learning that irrigation water may have been contaminated with the bacteria, said Tom Nunes Jr., president of the Salinas-based Nunes Co., a family-owned business with more than 20,000 acres of cropland in Arizona and California.

“We’re just reacting to a water test only. We know there’s generic E. coli on it, but we’re not sure what that means,” he said. “We’re being extra careful. This is precautionary.”

source: Associated Press, October 8, 2006

Senators Threaten to Impose Industrial-Strength Rules on Small Vegetable Farms
Responding to the spinach scare, Sens. Charles Schumer (Dem.-NY), Hillary Clinton (Dem.-NY), and Richard Durbin (D-IL) have rolled out a bill that would subject raw-vegetable production to a regulatory regime similar to the one governing meat. Their proposal would create a unified Food Safety Administration, combining under one umbrella the USDA’s jurisdiction over meat and poultry processing with the FDA’s over vegetable production. The Center for Science in the Public Interest supports the idea. “We need mandatory standards, enforced across the system,” says. The idea makes eminent sense — if you’re committed to preserving the industrial food system.

source: Grist, October 11, 2006

Rules on Small Vegetable Farms

Scientists Find Link Between Breast Cancer and Farm Work
A team of researchers who studied the occupations of nearly all the Windsor, Ontario women who developed breast cancer in a period from 2000 to 2002 found they were about three times more likely to have worked on farms than women who didn’t have the disease. Although the researchers didn’t determine what these risks were, they speculated about pesticides, many of which are able to mimic or block the normal functioning of estrogen and other hormones. “If you were going to hypothesize about the No. 1 most likely cause of this elevated risk, I think you’d have to look at the whole chemical exposure that exists on farms,” said Jim Brophy, head of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers in Sarnia, and lead author of the paper.

source: Toronto Globe and Mail, October 12, 2006

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Woodbury County Iowa has passed the first-in-the-nation policy that provides a property tax break to landowners who convert farmland to certified organic production. Up to $50,000 in tax breaks can be given in any given year and an individual landowner can qualify for up to $10,000 per year. The landowner must own at least 100 acres of the property, and the property must be organically produced and processed within a 100-mile radius of the courthouse in Sioux City. The policy was passed as a landowner incentive to convert farmland to certified organic production. Up to $10,000 in tax breaks can be given in any given year and an individual landowner can qualify for up to $50,000 in tax breaks.

Source: Chemical and Engineering News, October 2006

GM Disaster: Widespread Rice Contamination Found

An unapproved genetically engineered strain of rice has been found in trace amounts in commercial supplies over a wide area in the nation’s southern rice-growing region, the country’s largest marketer of rice said on August 21. The marketer, Riceland Foods, a farmer-owned cooperative, said samples from its five-state growing region — Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas — had tested positive for the genetically engineered trait.

The unapproved rice, a long-grain variety developed by Bayer CropScience, part of the Bayer Corporation, has been grown on a small scale in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and Missouri, the marketer said. Riceland said it wants to contact all rice growers in those states, but it is not clear how widespread the problem is.

GM rice have kept rising over the past several months. “We’ve got more orders from Europe to replace those which would otherwise have gone to the US,” said Wanlop Pitchaypong of Capital Rice, a major exporter. Farmers from the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKI), which represents hundreds of thousands of Indian farmers, torched a field in Haryana where tests for a GM rice variety were being carried out. The rice was at the harvest stage. After the incident, BKI said they planned to burn all such fields in India where trials are underway, saying it would contaminate existing rice. Source: New York Times, August 22, 2006

Biofuels from Grasses or Woody Plants Beat Corn and Soy

A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences finds that grasses and woody plants produced on marginally productive land, or agricultural wastes, are better sources of biofuels than corn. The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, finds that grasses and woody plants beat corn and soy in terms of energy yield and carbon emissions. The study found that grasses and woody plants are more efficient in terms of energy yield and carbon emissions than corn and soy.

Selenium Protects Insects from Viruses

Research at the USDA Agricultural Research Center in Columbia, Missouri, indicates that insects (like humans) short of the mineral selenium are more prone to attack by viruses. Although the research is still at a basic level, it may point to products which could replace toxic pesticides. Source: Acres, USA, September, 2006

rBST-free Milk Market Share Expanding

In June, Dean Foods, the nation’s largest milk producer, stopped accepting milk treated with the growth hormone rBST (recombinant bovine somatotropin) at a big bottling plant it owns in Florence, NJ. The bottled is now becoming a similar shift at its New England plants, and is considering such a move in Texas. Darigold, which is owned by the Northwest Dairy Association, has formed a cooperative, recently began selling only rBST-free milk in the Northwest. “I think it’s going to become a competitive disadvantage if you are not rBST-free,” said Randy Eronimous, the director of marketing for Darigold. He said surveys had shown that use of the hormone was beginning to affect consumer decisions on what milk to buy.

The trend is strongest in New England, where the new option sells for about a half-dollar more than conventional milk but still about two dollars below organic. “It’s like steroids for athletes,” said Stephen H. Taylor, New Hampshire’s Commissioner of Agriculture, Markets and Food, and a dairy farmer himself. “A lot of people in the dairy industry say goodbye and good riddance to BST.”


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biofuels than corn ethanol or soy biodiesel. The work analyzes the full life cycle of the various fuels and found that the grasses and woody plants could supply both a larger amount of fuel and with greater environmental benefits. Soy biodiesel has much less of an impact on the environment and a higher net energy benefit than corn ethanol, but neither can do much to meet US energy demand, the study found. All current corn and soy production in the country would provide only 12 percent of gasoline demand and 6 percent of diesel demand.

Source: Acres, USA, September, 2006

Lower Yields with Global Warming?

Researchers in field trials involving five major food crops at the University of Illinois have found that crops grown in atmospheres where carbon dioxide is artificially elevated result in as much as 50% lower yields. The atmosphere used in the trials is equivalent to what is projected for the earth’s atmosphere in 2050.

Source: Acres, USA, September, 2006

Pesticide Exposure Linked to Lower IQ

Preliminary results from a study of North Dakota farm children suggest that those exposed to pesticides test an average of 5 points lower on standard IQ tests. Researchers divided a group of children into those living on or near an active farm or field, and those living at least one mile from those locations. The first group had an average IQ score of 98; the second, 103. Scientists plan to continue to refine the study by taking blood and urine tests and correlating the results with IQ and other measures of mental acuity.

Source: Pesticides and You, Summer, 2006

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source: Pesticides and You, Summer, 2006

OERF Announces Grand Deadline

The Organic Farming Research Foundation is seeking proposals for research into organic livestock systems, and economic and system-management approaches to problems for small and medium-sized organic farms. Organic farmers are encouraged to apply. The funding limit is $15,000 and the deadline is December 15. For more information go to www.oerf.org/research/application.htm or call Jane Sooby at 831-426-6606.

Source: Organic Broadcaster, Nov/Dec 2006

California Raw Milk Dairy Bills State for Shutdown

Organic Pastures Dairy, Inc., a 300 cow raw milk dairy, was shut down by the state of California for two weeks and had to recall its milk from 300 stores because four children experienced E. coli 0157:H7 food poisoning. The only common exposure among the children was consuming Organic Pastures products, the state said. But after running 600 tests on the milk, no E. coli were found. Mark McAfee, owner of the dairy, said he lost $250,000 and was targeted by the California Department of Food and Agriculture because of a “hatred for raw milk”. He sent the state a bill for his losses.


OTA Joins USDA to Fight Harvey Suit

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) has filed a brief in support of the USDA, seeking to have Arthur Harvey’s new lawsuit dismissed. Harvey is seeking to force the USDA to get approval from the NOSB for use of items used as food contact substances in organic foods. The USDA has taken the position that any item on a list allowed by the FDA can be used in organic foods, without approval by the NOSB. Harvey is the Mane blueberry grower who won a previous lawsuit against the USDA’s management of the National Organic Program, but saw most of his victory overturned by a secret OTA-backed Congressional amendment to the Organic Foods Production Act last fall.

Source: Acres, USA, November, 2006

Cornucopia Institute Charges Wal-Mart with Selling Non-organic food as Organic

A formal legal complaint has been filed with the USDA asking them to investigate allegations of illegal “organic” food distribution by Wal-Mart Stores. Inc. “We first noticed that Wal-Mart was using in-store signage to misidentify conventionally grown, non-organic food as organic in their upscale-market test stores in Plano, Texas,” said Mark Kastel of The Cornucopia Institute. Subsequently, Cornucopia staff visited a number of other Wal-Mart stores in the Midwest and documented similar misappropriations in both produce and dairy sections. Cornucopia notified Wal-Mart’s CEO Lee Scott in a letter on September 13, 2006 alerting the company to the problem and asking that it address and correct the situation on an immediate basis. But the same product misrepresentations were again observed weeks later, throughout October, at separate Wal-Mart stores in multiple states.

Cornucopia’s complaint asks the USDA to fully investigate the allegations of organic food misrepresentation. The farm policy organization has indicated that they will share their evidence, including photographs and notes, with the agency’s investigators. Fines of up to $10,000 per violation for proven incidents of organic food misrepresentation are provided for in federal organic regulations.

Earlier this year, Wal-Mart announced a sweeping organic foods initiative and declared that they would greatly increase the number of organic offerings for sale in their stores—at dramatically lower prices than the competition. The move by the giant retailer has been under close scrutiny from members of the organic community seeking to assess what impact Wal-Mart’s decision will have on organic food and farming concerns.

Source: Cornucopia Institute press release, November 14, 2006

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Mr. Tester Goes to Washington

ed.: Jon Tester, an organic farmer from Montana, has been elected U.S. Senator in a close race, defeating Republican Conrad Burns. Mr. Tester has been a leader in the organic movement for more than a decade. He served as the national treasurer for the Organic Crop Improvement Association International, and helped to develop the Montana Organic Certification program. Here is the story as carried in the New York Times of November 13, 2006.

Fresh Off the Farm in Montana, a Senator-to-Be
By Timothy Egan

GREAT FALLS, Mont., Nov. 9 — When he joins the United States Senate in January, big Jon Tester — who is just under 300 pounds in his boots — will most likely be the only person in the world’s most exclusive club who knows how to butcher a cow or grease a combine.

All his life, Mr. Tester, 50, has lived no more than two hours from his farm, an infinity of flat on the windswept expanse of north-central Montana, hard by the Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation.

For all the talk about the new Democrats swept into office on Tuesday, the senator-elect from Montana truly is your grandfather’s Democrat — a pro-gun, anti-big-business prairie pragmatist whose life is defined by the treeless patch of hard Montana dirt that has been in the family since 1916.

It is a place with 105-degree summer days and winter chills of 30 below zero, where his grandparents are buried, where his two children learned to grow crops in a dry land entirely dependent on rainfall, and where, he says, he earned barely $20,000 a year farming over the last decade.

“It’s always been tight, trying to make a living on that farm,” said Mr. Tester, still looking dazed and bloodshot-eyed after defeating Senator Conrad Burns, a three-week incumbent, by fewer than 3,000 votes.

Chouteau County, where Mr. Tester lives on a homestead of 1,800 acres, lost 8.5 percent of its population in the last five years — typical of much of rural America that has been in decline since the Dust Bowl.

To make extra money, Mr. Tester taught music to schoolchildren, and still plays a decent trumpet despite having only seven fingers (he lost the rest to a meat grinder as a child). He got into politics just eight years ago in a sustained rage over what utility deregulation had done to small farmers and businesses in Montana.

“You think of the Senate as a millionaire’s club — well, Jon is going to be the blue-collar guy who brings an old-fashioned, Jeffersonian ideal about being tied to the land,” said Steve Doherty, a friend of Mr. Tester’s for 20 years. “He’s a small farmer from the homestead. That’s absolutely who he is. That place defines him.”

Mr. Tester used to ride his motorcycle down from his farm to Great Falls to play softball with Mr. Tester — who gave Democrats control of the Senate.

“I’m kind of a fatalist,” he said, breaking into a smile. “The good Lord gives you opportunities.”

And Mr. Tester learned quickly how to exploit those opportunities, running a bare-knuckle campaign against Mr. Burns, with a barrage of name-calling and negative advertisements making hay of the senator’s ties to Jack Abramoff, the disgraced former Washington lobbyist.

Republicans complained that Mr. Tester’s campaign was relentless and went overboard. Montana is a big state with a small population, where politicians are known on a first-name basis. The ferocity of such attacks seemed out of place, some here said.

Also, they said Mr. Tester favored measures while in the State Senate that had the effect of raising taxes on many of the small businesses that he promotes. They called him “Taxer Tester” for much of election year.

But with his trademark flattop — refreshed every three weeks for $8 at the Riverview barbershop here in Great Falls — Mr. Tester was a tough target for Republicans to stereotype as “just another Washington insider,” as one radio attack ad put it.

Republicans have kept their hold on the intermountain West in part by promoting issues known as the Three G’s: gays, guns and God.

On gays, Mr. Tester says the “sacred document” of the Constitution should not be amended to outlaw same-sex marriage, though he favored a state ban that voters passed in 2004. On guns, Mr. Tester is quite proficient in their use, and says anyone — Republican or Democrat — who tries to take his away will run into trouble. On God, Mr. Tester says simply that he is a churchgoer, and notes that he met his wife when he spotted her in a pew.

“The fact is, I’m just a regular Montanian,” he said. “Those issues are important, but what I heard from people is concern about health care, fiscal responsibility and how we’re throwing so much money into a war.”

Mr. Tester and his wife of 28 years, Sharla, grow organic lentils, barley, peas and gluten-free grain in a county with 1.5 people per square mile. It is all earth and sky on the Tester family ground. A hundred years ago, a region with so few people was considered frontier.

Mr. Tester is very much in the mode of his longtime friend Gov. Brian Schweitzer, a Democrat who can be more prickly than Mr. Tester. The governor recalled a favorite moment with Mr. Tester from the last legislative session.

Montana Democratic Senator-elect Jon Tester, organic farmer

“We’re sitting there in this room where governors and powerful people used to drink whiskey and smoke cigars, me and Jon, and both of us had a bag of sunflower seeds — Russian peanuts we call them — trying to spit the shells into a cup,” Mr. Schweitzer said. “We looked at each other and laughed, like, What are we doing here?”

Republicans said that Mr. Tester was a favorite of “extreme liberal bloggers” and that the down-home persona masked an agenda out of step with much of America.

And indeed, the liberal Web site Daily Kos took up Mr. Tester’s cause early. When he announced he was running for the Senate, he was an underdog to a better-financed and better-known Democrat who was being promoted by the party establishment.

After Mr. Tester won the primary by a huge margin, Daily Kos posted a picture of him on its site, with the caption, “Say hello to the next senator from the great state of Montana.”

Mr. Tester is also a favorite of the band Pearl Jam, which promotes many liberal causes. But his tie is personal. The area around the town of Big Sandy, population 658 and falling, produced not only Mr. Tester, but also Jeff Ament, the bassist for Pearl Jam. The band did a concert in Missoula this year for Mr. Tester.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Tester spoke often of how “regular folks” just “haven’t been given enough.”

Mr. Tester said he planned to respond to his critics by working with Republicans in the Senate who are just as concerned about the future of working people. He said his new senators’ approach would be unusually collaborative.

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Asked why he became a Democrat in a region that has been overwhelmingly Republican for the last generation, Mr. Tester said: “It started with my parents, who always said the Democrats work for the middle class. And in agriculture, Franklin Roosevelt did a lot of good things.”

Friends say not to worry about Mr. Tester going native in Washington. He said he planned to return home to the farm several times a month. He promised his barber, Bill Graves, that he would continue to come back to get his hair cut in the same wheat-field bristle.

“Trained my whole life,” Mr. Tester said. “Goodbye.”

They called him “Say hello to the next senator from the great state of Montana.”

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“My life is living the farm,” Mr. Doherty said. “It’s always been tight, trying to make a living on that farm.”

Still, there was never a master plan, Mr. Tester said, for the arc that took him from soil conservation district leader to state senator to one of the victors of how "regular folks" just "haven’t been given enough."
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Globalization and Agriculture: an Introduction
by Jack Kittredge

For the average American today, breakfast is an international event: a cup of coffee from Columbia or tea from Sri Lanka, a bowl of cereal topped with bananas from Honduras or pineapple from the Philippines. We now purchase foods independent of place or season. We eat as easily from half way around the globe as from a mile down the road.

Perhaps even more remarkable, citizens of Columbia or Sri Lanka, Honduras or the Philippines are as likely to be eating internationally. Corn, wheat, rice, and soy from abroad are now staples in the diets of most Third World countries, produced in developed countries with the aid of huge agricultural subsidies and sold for less than the cost of production in world markets.

While most economists and development experts laud this world trade in agricultural products as good for both sides, it comes with some steep social and environmental costs that are hidden from the public.

The collapse of prices for local agricultural products has shaken the foundations of traditional agrarian societies. Close-knit families, pressured by the loss of markets, are splitting up. Millions of people have left the countryside, flooding into urban centers and fueling unemployment, drug addiction and prostitution. Those who remain behind tend to fall further into poverty, losing their land to corporations and wealthy landlords. When they do work, they face serious health concerns caused by higher exposure to the pesticides and herbicides required for large-scale cultivation.

The expansion of world trade responsible for these developments has been intentional and was mediated by several international organizations. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were created near the end of World War Two by the victors as a way to prevent the general collapse of trade which many felt had brought on the Great Depression. The Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944 attempted to stabilize the international monetary system and adopted a General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT, later to become the World Trade Organization or WTO) designed to reduce tariffs and facilitate trade between countries.

The idea is for the IMF and World Bank to make loans to Third World countries, while imposing measures to curb inflation, increase exports and strengthen the fiscal condition of these debtor nations, allowing them to pay back their loans.

These policies normally include several approaches and measures as they pertain to the rural sectors: the withdrawal of the state from economic activities, the closure or downgrading of state marketing boards, privatization, reduction or removal of subsidies, elimination of import controls such as quantitative restrictions, reduction of import tariffs, re-orientation towards exports, and investment liberalization and deregulation, or the opening up to foreign ownership of assets.

The World Bank and IMF implement these “reforms” in a four-step formula for each country. The formula includes Capital-market liberalization, privatization, market-based pricing, and, finally, the introduction of “free trade.” In step one, restrictions on capital are freed up so it can flow in and out across the borders. Generally the result is the increased flow of capital out to external businesses with no guarantee that money will flow in through foreign investment.

Privatization is the second step. This refers to the transfer of traditionally state-run services and utilities like gas, oil, roads, water, post offices, and banks to private companies. This problem, say critics, is that private ownership of a country’s framework leaves it unable to protect its citizens or natural resources from abuses of power.

Step three of the program, market-based pricing, is the point at which consumer purchasing-power drops and the local economy really begins to suffer. The country’s political leaders no longer have the ability to place local controls on economic trends and the country and its citizens become vulnerable to the whims of the global market.

The final step in the formula is free trade. But “free” is a relative term when referring to import/export values and global trade agreements. Third World nations are not on the same economic footing as the developed countries are able to continue with and even expand their domestic subsidies, and to continue with significant levels of export subsidies as well as high tariffs on their sensitive agriculture products, whilst the developing countries are “policy takers” in the sense that they have had little say in the making of the rules or policies of some of the powerful international agencies, particularly the IMF, World Bank and the WTO, and they have to implement the policies at a national level which have been laid out through these agencies. The developed countries are able to be “policy makers” as they have overwhelming influence at the World Bank and IMF (by virtue of the voting system which is weighted by equity shares) as well as at the WTO.

In actuality, the common result of these “structural adjustment” policies on developing countries has been depressed wages, reduced consumer purchasing-power, and environmental degradation, while boosting returns for multinational investors. Small farmers, having lost their subsidies and import protections, are driven off their land into overcrowded cities. According to a number of economists, including the former chief economist for the World Bank, as western investment in the Third World increased throughout the ’90s, so did poverty and social instability.

Thus the global economic framework on agriculture, shaped to a large extent by the loan conditionalities of the International Financial Organizations and the rules of the WTO, have resulted in a situation where the developed countries are able to continue with and even expand their domestic subsidies, and to continue with significant levels of export subsidies as well as high tariffs on their sensitive agriculture products, whilst the developing countries are constrained (by the WTO rules, by loan conditionalities and by budget constraints) from increasing their farm subsidies, and have strong pressures (through loan conditionalities) to maintain low applied tariff rates and even reduce these, as well as to significantly reduce their bound tariffs (through existing WTO rules and new proposed rules).

Based on work by Robert Toland, Tony Cullen, Scott Frazier, and Martin Khor.
Small Farmers Around the World: Changing Markets and the Organic Alternative

by Meenakshi Raman

Many international agencies, policy makers and academics have been advocating a closer integration of rural producers and the agricultural sector of developing countries with the market, both local and global. This is believed to be a vital (even a necessary) route for the rural population to get out of the cycle of poverty. On the other hand, there are two increasing concerns. Firstly, barriers against market access remain strong, especially in the developed countries (which maintain massive domestic support in agriculture), and these limit the export opportunities for the developing countries’ agricultural products. Secondly, despite the continued protectionism in the rich countries, the developing countries have increasingly liberalized their agricultural imports, and opened themselves to the risk of cheaper imports competing with and often displacing the products of local farmers.

In addition, remoteness, rurality and poverty create large physical problems and constraints on market access by poor, remote or rural communities. These include:

• Lack of roads, or presence of seasonably impassable or poorly maintained roads.
• High transport costs, arising from the lack of well-maintained roads, long distances and lack of affordable, appropriate transport.
• Poor or non-existent communications infrastructure for disseminating information on markets, products and prices.
• Low value/weight ratios of much of what poor people make and sell, which make transporting it to market difficult and costly.
• The perishable nature of much agricultural produce from the rural poor, especially women, combined with a lack of storage facilities and long distance markets.

Case Studies

Mexican Farmers Affected by Cheap Imports

In 2002, tens of thousands of Mexican farmers took to the streets of Mexico City, calling on the government to accord them greater protection in the face of U.S. imports under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Mexican farmers’ movement began intensifying their protests against NAFTA and the dire poverty in the countryside movement began intensifying their protests against Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Mexican farmers’

Mexican exports of farm products to the U.S rose to $6.2 billion in 2001, from $3.2 billion in 1993. Imports of U.S farm goods to Mexico have skyrocketed, however, and farm groups allege that massive subsidies, cheap credit, better transportation and technology give U.S farmers an unfair advantage. The main beneficiaries of rising Mexican exports have been large corporate farms rather than the small-plot farms on which millions of Mexicans still live.

An analysis by the US-based group Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) showed in 2001 that corn cost an average of $3.41 a bushel to produce in the U.S and is sold in the world market for $2.28 a bushel. Food First, a California-based group, reported that California rice costs between $700 and $800 an acre to produce but receives $650 an acre on the world market and that U.S wheat is exported at 46% below cost. The sale at prices below production cost is made possible by domestic and/or export subsidies.

Critics of NAFTA say that after two decades of trade liberalization, Mexican agriculture has steadily lost ground with more than 1.7 million people being displaced. On the other hand, much of the $6 billion in agro-export earnings have gone to fewer than 7 per cent of Mexican farmers.

Haiti and Rice

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with a per capita income of $556. Two-thirds of its people live in rural areas, and 80% of them are poor. Rice is a major staple in the Haitian diet, produced mainly by small farmers. Twenty per cent of people depend on rice cultivation for their livelihoods. Moreover, thousands of agricultural laborers, traders and millers derive income from rice.

Having gone through rapid trade liberalization in recent years, Haiti is now one of the most open economies in the world. Liberalization of the rice market began in the 1980s. In 1994/95, under pressure from the IMF and the US, the rice tariff was cut from 35 per cent to 3 per cent.

After the first wave of liberalization, rice producers reported that prices fell by 50 per cent during 1986-7. Local production fell by 27 per cent in 1995 and between 1985 and 1999, rice imports increased 30 times as a result. Subsidized US rice constitutes most of the rice imports.

These trends have severely undermined the livelihoods of 50,000 rice-farming families and led to a rural exodus. Initially, cheap imports benefited poor consumers. However, in recent years, these benefits have been diminishing. Due to the depreciation of the national currency and to cartel activities by rice importers, the prices of local and imported rice are now converging. According to the FAO, overall malnutrition has increased since the start of trade liberalization, affecting 48 per cent of the population in the 1979-81 and 62 per cent in 1996-98. Almost half of Haiti’s food needs are now met by imports.

Honduras and Rice

Honduras produced 100 per cent of its rice needs and even had surpluses to export in the 1980s. It was known as the grain basket of Central America. However the situation was to change with the rapid liberalization of its rice sector.

Under pressure from the IMF the Honduran government abolished the system of import controls and threw the rice market wide open. The local rice faced unfair competition from heavily subsidized US rice imports, which enjoy subsidies worth 65 per cent of the production cost of rice in Honduras.

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Against such unfair competition, rice production in the country collapsed and the farmers’ plight was worsened by hurricane Mitch in 1998. Rice production fell to just 1 per cent of domestic needs, with the gap filled by imports, leading to unemployment and lawlessness.

Subsequently, Honduran rice farmers fought back by forming their own association with rice processors and won an agreement that processors must first buy local rice before they can bring in foreign imports. In 2002, according to the rice producers association, Honduran farmers produced 16 per cent of their country’s needs. In 2003, it was to rise to 33 per cent.

Jamaica and the Dairy Sector

Jamaica is well suited for dairy production with ample pastureland, water and a well-adapted cow breed. According to the Jamaica Dairy Farmers Federation, in the 1960s there were 4,000 small dairy farmers and 200,000 acres of improved pasture. In 2003, there were less than 200 dairy farmers left, most of whom are small farmers. However, 50 per cent of the milk production is from two corporate farms.

During the past decade, there has been a marked decline in the local production of milk from a peak of 38.8 million liters in 1992 to about 18 million in 2002. According to the JDFF this decline was largely a result of the negative impact of trade liberalization and specifically the dumping of subsidized milk powder which followed the lifting of trade restrictions in 1992.

Ghana and Food Crops

Agriculture accounts for over 40 per cent of Ghana’s GDP and employs most of the labor force. Economic reforms began in 1983. As part of the reforms, the government removed food price controls while promoting domestic industries. In 1994, in order to comply with the conditionalities of the World Bank and IMF under structural adjustment loan agreements, Ghana opened up its economy. It gradually reduced tariffs between 1994 and 2001 from an average of 36 per cent to 14 percent, with the highest tariffs falling from 70 per cent to 42 per cent. Import quotas and licences were eliminated altogether.

The poultry industry

The poultry industry in Senegal plays a key role, employing around 100,000 workers. By 1997, 2.5kg of chicken per person and this increased to 2.5kg in 1997. By 2000, local domestic semi-industrial farms were producing around a third of the country’s total poultry meat, with smaller traditional farms supplying the remaining two-thirds.

The government lowered tariffs on imported chicken parts from 60 per cent to 20 per cent in 2000. This led to an 11-fold increase in the volume of chicken meat imports between 1999 and 2003. Three-quarters of this, primarily in the form of frozen chicken parts, came from the EU (mainly Holland and Belgium). These were sold at half the price of the local equivalent. Between 1992 and 1999, there was a general expansion of poultry meat exports from 400,000 to 1 million tons resulting from the reform of the cereals sector in the EU.

Following the subsidies given to cereal farmers in Europe, the EU producer price for wheat, fodder and barley (which make up about half of the ingredients for poultry feed) dropped by around 50 per cent between 1990 and 2002. Consequently, the price of poultry feed in Europe fell by almost a third. Since poultry feed comprises 70 per cent of the cost of poultry production, the price drop made EU exports much more competitive. There was an exponential rise of chicken parts exports to Senegal, from 1,787 tons in 2000 to 9,312 tons in 2003, which depressed the chicken prices in Senegal.

Local chicken production dropped by a third, leading to around 2000 job losses and the closure of seven out of every ten chicken farms in Senegal. Hence, the livelihoods of many small farmers were destroyed and most industrial producers are out of business. Maize farmers were also hit by the collapse of the chicken industry as locally grown maize is mostly used for chicken feed. The collapse of commercial chicken farms as a result of European imports of chicken parts has cost maize farmers

Conway School of Landscape Design

The Conway School of Landscape Design teaches the application of ecological principles to the design and management of land and resources. By planning and designing programs for residential, municipal, and non-profit clients, students learn a constellation of skills including design graphics, practical problem-solving, ability to communicate design solutions, and ecological advocacy.

Founded in 1972, CSLD’s ten-month program stresses self-direction and team learning, and prepares graduates for a rich and diverse range of jobs in such fields as community planning, conservation, site design, land stewardship, and site management.

Indian rice paddy in the evening

Photo by Jack Keleher
and their families billions in lost sales. In addition, imports of subsidized cereal meal and pellets from the EU have risen almost four-fold since 1993.

Mountainous Areas Hard Hit

The limited accessibility, fragility, marginality and diversity of mountain areas generally require diversification of resource use and production. But globalization, guided by short-term profitability and external demand, promotes narrow specialization in few specific products. It encourages indiscriminate resource-use intensification and over-extraction of niche opportunities, with little concern for their environmental and socio-economic consequences. The process of globalization is so rapid that mountain communities do not have sufficient lead-time and capacity to adapt.

In India, for example, products such as off-season vegetables, crop seeds, honey, mushrooms, flowers and herbs can now be produced cost effectively, and in large quantities, in greenhouses in the plains of Punjab, substituting the production of such commodities in the mountain areas of Himachal Pradesh.

In another example, it is difficult for apples from the mountain areas of India to compete in the domestic market with imports of apples from developed countries.

Philippines: Marginalization of Western Mindanao Fisherfolk

Artisanal fishermen in the Western Mindanao area are being marginalized, mainly through unfair competition with the growing number of commercial fishing units which employ only 2 per cent of the fisher population. From 1991 to 1995, commercial landings grew by 295,000 tons, while the landings of the artisanal fishermen (comprising 14 per cent of the fisher population) declined by 150,000 tons.

Philippines and Poultry Sector

Due to the Philippines’s commitment to the WTO, chicken imports grew tremendously in 1998. More than half of the chicken imports in 1996 came from Singapore and 12 per cent from China. In 1997, the U.S accounted for four-fifths of chicken imports. From 1997 till 2000, the U.S and Canada accounted for 79 per cent of chicken imports.

In 2000, the U.S Agriculture Department accused the Philippine government of violating WTO rules when the import of US chicken was disallowed. The Philippine government limited the import of U.S chicken according to the Minimum Access Volume (MAV) to curtail dumping. According to the MAV, only 19,000 metric tons could be imported to safeguard the local chicken industry.

U.S. chicken, whose price was at one time as low as P60 per kilo at the shelves, is priced below the cost of production. “These are excess produce of the US market that is being dumped here and is killing our local chicken market which is priced at about P91 per kilo, already down from P120 before US chicken flooded the market”, said a Philippine Daily Inquirer article. It added that 330,000 workers or a third of a million in the chicken industry were affected.

India and Import of Skimmed Milk, Butter Oil and Milk Powder

Indian farmers have in recent years faced competition from imported skimmed milk. According to Devinder Sharma (2002):

“The import of 17,000 tons of skimmed milk powder from Denmark at zero duty a couple of years ago resulted in a political uproar in Punjab. The dairy industry is once again up in arms. New Zealand has dumped a large quantity of butter oil into India. Even after paying an import duty of 35.2 per cent, the butter oil imports have been at less than $1,000 per ton against the prevailing global price of $1,300 per ton. Domestic prices crashed, coming down by 10-15 per cent.”

It took India nearly 30 years to achieve self-sufficiency in milk production, involving farmers through a network of cooperatives. The logic behind importing milk powder without countervailing duties is difficult to fathom, when their own governments are giving them massive subsidies. The Producer Subsidy equivalent (subsidy as a percentage of value of milk produced) in 1997 was 82 per cent in Japan, 59 per cent in Canada, 54 per cent in the EU, 47 per cent in the US and 23 per cent in Australia.

Indonesian Farmers Affected by Cheap Imports

Indonesian farmers in several sectors – including poultry, rice and corn have been affected by cheap imports on different occasions in recent years. According to a 2002 report:

“Indonesia has spent the last few years adjusting its import policies with WTO agreements. But lowering import duties and lifting bans on various commodities have not sat well with local producers, who say they are being forced to close shop as a result. Complaining loudest are those in agriculture-related businesses as well as poultry and animal husbandry entrepreneurs, who grumble that the flood of imports is hurting them most. Food imports have been growing.”

Indonesia is already a major importer of rice. Intensifying dependence on expensive corn imports, meanwhile, has led to an 80 per cent contraction in the chicken industry, which uses corn for feed. When the price of imported feed soared in mid-January, many poultry farmers went out of business. Now, an upcoming lifting of a ban on imported chicken legs has local chicken breeders up in arms again; at least 48,000 breeders have suspended their operations. The local industry is not yet ready to compete with cheaper imports...”

In 1997, the country was hit by the Asian financial crisis and Indonesia turned to the IMF for emergency support. Although the crisis was rooted in the banking sector and exchange rate policy, the IMF demanded trade liberalization measures in both the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. This included ending the monopoly of the government’s food agency (BULOG) on food imports and marketing, and cutting the import tariff on rice to zero.

From 1996 to 1999, rice imports more than doubled, reaching 4.7 million tons. Since BULOG was unable to defend the floor price promised to producers, farmers were left to sell their crops at low prices. In late 1999, the government stepped in to restrict the flood in imports and in 2000, re-introduced a levy, equivalent to an import tariff of 30 per cent.

Research in West Java in 2004 among rice-farming families, however, showed that BULOG was no longer buying the rice of farmers, who now have to sell to middlemen at prices 25-40 per cent below the promised floor price for rice.

Organic Agriculture Among Small Farmers in Latin America and the Caribbean

Despite this litany of collapsed markets for small farmers in developing nations, there is one promising avenue of approach. Organic production and marketing systems are providing an alternative.
According to a 2003 study, the following are among the significant impacts of organic production on small farmers in Latin America and the Caribbean:

1. The shift to organic production had positive impacts on the incomes of small farmers in all the case studies as all the organic producers obtained higher net revenues relative to their previous situation. The sustainability of these effects depends on many factors, including the capacity to maintain similar or higher yields and the future prices of organic products.

2. Those farmers who used to produce under production systems closer to the organic system experienced a rapid increase in yields after shifting to organic methods of production. In contrast, those who used to apply chemical inputs obtained lower yields during the first years after the shift. Farmers in some cases (bananas in the Dominican Republic and honey in Mexico) experienced no significant change in yields.

3. All farmers who shifted to organic farming obtained higher prices for their produce than those obtained by conventional producers located close by. Apart from the organic nature of the products, the higher prices were also attributable to the type of relationship the farmers had established with buyers. Higher prices were obtained when farmer organizations succeeded in developing long-term relationships with buyers.

4. Small farmers dominated organic production in all countries in the region except in Argentina. Such a dominant share in organic farming suggests that small farmers may have a comparative advantage in organic production. This is because most small farmers already produce more or less ‘organically’, using few or no chemical inputs and frequently grow crops under the forest and mixed with other species. Thus, they find the shift to organic production relatively easy. The technologies of organic production require little investment and are labor intensive. They thus rely on factors of production that are most available to small farmers.

5. The organic system has positive effects on the health of producers and workers and on the environment. Further, organic production has introduced additional improvements such as soil-conservation measures that are absent among conventional producers. They have also helped preserve natural forests and biodiversity, characterized by a high number of species of trees and birds.

The constraints faced by some small organic producers included insecure land tenure, ensuring quality of production especially in relation to access to foreign markets, lack of extension services with professionals trained in organic agriculture and limited availability of formal sources of on-farm credit.

It is also pertinent to note that government policies and institutions dealing specifically with organic agriculture have played a marginal role in the emergence of organic products in general and in the success of the small producers in the case studies.

The marketing of organic products through farmer associations has established direct contact with buyers and this has been key in helping small farmers obtain better prices. Long-term contracts have been better, as they provide a safe market and stable prices. Access to fair-trade markets has increased substantially and further reduced price instability.
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Six Tzotzil Maya men sat across from us: dark haired, with short, powerful legs built for everyday mountain climbing, they wore T-shirts, jeans, and bandannas across their stoic faces.

Outside, the grey gravel road that is Oventic’s main street meandered down toward a small stream, flanked by wood clapboard shacks festooned with Zapatista murals and slogans. At the bottom, near the stream, was a concrete basketball court. At the top, a flimsy length of barbed wire was guarded by two Zapatista women, wearing traditional colorful dresses and ski masks. They were unarmed.

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“Friends,” one of our hosts said, breaking the silence. And suddenly I felt a great weight, built by the silence, break down upon me. I felt the ancestry of the men before me: how the Maya had carved the first terraces and cornfields from the mountainsides over fifteen hundred years ago, how those settlers subsisted during the rise and fall of the Mayan empire, then survived for centuries of Aztec, Spanish, and Institutional Revolutionary Party rule. I had read all the history before my trip, but in that room, I felt its weight for the first time.

A Central American coffee farm

Chiapas Coffee Cooperative

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“Friends, welcome. We are greatly inspired and encouraged by your visit . . . for we are fighting a war against oblivion.”

The “war against oblivion” is used commonly by many Zapatistas to describe their struggle, which became open with their short-lived invasion of Chiapas province’s capital, San Cristobal de las Casas, on January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect. It is, I think, the most truthful way to describe the Zapatista cause. While it grew from the long heritage of Mexican land struggles (of which Emiliano Zapata, the new Zapatista’s namesake, is a key figure), it is not simply a struggle for more land on the part of the peasantry. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which held power from the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) to 2000, evolved a complicated, nepotistic system for resolving land disputes, usually by allotting some extra ejidos – common lands guaranteed to each village, traditionally used for subsistence crops of corn, beans, and squash – while reserving the best soils for the big hacendados growing for export.

In 1991, Carlos Salinas, the ruling PRI president, liquidated the ejidos, enabling Mexico’s dirt farming villages to sell their lands for cash – but exposing them to loss of their only traditional security: land. The writing was on the wall: the days of ejidal land reforms were over.

Nor is the Zapatista struggle a war against globalization, as many foreigners seem to think. Indeed, the Zapatistas have turned the global community into their most potent strategic advantage. Their weapons and barbed wire are nothing more than symbols; the Mexican army possesses far superior firepower. Oventic Aguascalientes II is protected by the groups of passport-carrying foreigners (such as us) who visit there – and our corresponding influential embassies. The Zapatistas are able to attract foreigners to their cause because they are internet and media savvy and they speak a language appealing to liberals.

But the war against oblivion does refer to a certain kind of globalization. In the Chiapas highlands, as in most of Mexico, many are leaving their lands and...
homes to travel north, to Mexico City or the United States, to work. They cannot grow corn for profit, because the subsidized US corn production machine is spilling into their market. And they are lured by all the same things that lure everybody to the dream of affluent consumerism. But this journey carries a price: it is as though they are crossing the river Lethe, losing memory and culture with each step further. The war against oblivion struggles against the loss of the Mayan identity itself. If it is lost, then the weighted silence I remember so clearly will disappear forever, replaced by the discordant electronic noises of fragmented postmodernism.

And in order to win, the Zapatistas must figure out how to stay at home, how to stay on their lands. The economic and political crisis in the Chiapas highlands was compounded by an environmental one. Centuries of corn agriculture combined with population growth had ruined many of the fragile mountain soils. Traditionally, farmers traversed their steep soils at harvest time, snapping the corn stalks and drying the ears in the field. After the harvest, they burned their fields, returning some potassium and other nutrients, but damaging their decomposition and humus structure, further adding to their erosion. This left them dependent on artificial fertilizers, which had to be imported. The PRI traditionally owned the fertilizer – and gave it out for “free”, which meant political favors and/or votes. This did nothing to halt the soil erosion and ensuing poverty which has plagued Chiapas in the last half century. Under these conditions, it’s no wonder many chose to leave. A more sustainable agriculture had to be found.

Enter coffee, a shade tolerant perennial plant, ideally suited to forested mountain slopes. Much Mexican coffee was grown in large plantations covered in shadecloth, but in the mountains of Chiapas, through the 1970’s and 80’s, farmers slowly developed small plantations on their ejidal lands.

Juan Perez Hernandez was president of the Mut Vitz (“Mountain of Birds”) Coffee Grower’s Cooperative, located a few miles from Oventic, and, it’s an open secret, run by Zapatista-minded farmers. Unlike the men who had greeted us at Oventic, Juan wore a white collared shirt tucked into khaki pants. He had the demeanor of many a successful businessman: talkative gregariousness combined with sharp-edged salesmanship.

The Cooperative formed in 1997, in an attempt to bargain higher prices out of the Mexican middlemen who bought its coffee. It was currently in the process of transitioning to organic certification, explained Juan. “Traditionally, we weren’t organic. One year, the government would decide to give out fertilizer, then the next year, nothing! We decided we needed to build our own fertility.”

Traditional know-how combined with foreign agronomic expertise in organic coffee growing. Now, Mut Vitz’s coffee growers used challum trees to shade their coffee plants, rather than cloth. Challum was a broad-leaved tree that grows higher than coffee, providing the necessary shade. Its roots held mountain soils well, and its abundant foliage readily dropped to the ground, providing excellent mulch and fertilizer for the coffee plants.

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With the republication of author Charles Walters. Specifics on a makes the connection between Softcover, 352 pages. This is a concise, yet includes In this comprehensive guide for their branches invitingly toward our fingers. Each leaves and organic matter ground into a moist shoulders, up steep slopes littered with chillum So we trudged, wicker baskets slung over our In January, Juan still had a few scraggly berries with their thumbs, one at a time. It was easy to understand why most coffee growers still preferred chemical fertilizers to compost; It was because Mut Vitz dealt directly with North American buyers, rather than Mexican middlemen. As the market for fairly traded, organic coffee increased in America, so did the opportunities and prices for the Mut Vitz coffee cooperative. For instance, Dean’s Beans of Amherst, carries Mut Vitz’s coffee. In order to succeed, the Mut Vitz growers have had to abandon corn farming and other “traditional” agriculture. But by engaging in the global coffee trade, they have created a more sustainable agriculture — and, more importantly, they are staying on their land and working toward a solid economy.

The principal advantage, as Juan explained, for being organically certified was the price. This is because Mut Vitz dealt directly with North American buyers, rather than Mexican middlemen. As the market for fairly traded, organic coffee increased in America, so did the opportunities and prices for the Mut Vitz coffee cooperative. For instance, Dean’s Beans of Amherst, carries Mut Vitz’s coffee. In order to succeed, the Mut Vitz growers have had to abandon corn farming and other “traditional” agriculture. But by engaging in the global coffee trade, they have created a more sustainable agriculture — and, more importantly, they are staying on their land and working toward a solid economy.

We strained upwards with our necks and fingers, twisting berries from the branches. About after half an hour, my picking partner wryly exclaimed to me, “Enough. This ecotourist is pooped.”

We left shortly thereafter, a handful of red berries rattling around in the bottoms of our baskets.

The average Mut Vitz grower harvested twelve hours to make about twenty baskets in that time. Their annual income for their efforts was around $600, and this was considered a good price.

We descended the mountainside to Juan’s house, where his family operated the hand-cranked shelling machine to separate bean from pulp. The pulp was carted to the compost pile, while the beans, which still had a viscous coating on them, were fermented in a large concrete tank. After a few days, the sugar coating was gone. Juan drew off the The bright-red, cranberry-sized coffee berries ripened in December, and the harvest began. The growers climbed their ladders with wooden baskets slung over their shoulders and twisted the berries off with their thumbs, one at a time. In January, Juan still had a few scraggly berries left on a few of his trees, so he decided to let his American guests try their hands at coffee picking. So we trudged, wicker baskets slung over our shoulders, up steep slopes littered with chillum and organic matter ground into a moist paste, smell of moldy decomposition in our noses, to arrive at our coffee trees, whose red berries bent their branches heavily. Each plant grew about eight feet tall, while the chalumeau went to about twenty.

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If they can succeed, they will have maintained their villages and gained a tactical advantage in the war against oblivion that they never could have gained with gun or proclamation. Theirs is not a battle against globalization, but for a battle for their souls; they seek to join the world community on their own terms.

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A Case in Point: Cargill 1

by Corporate Accountability International

A Corporate Snapshot

The world’s largest private corporation, Cargill, Inc. supplies food, agricultural and “risk management” products and services around the world. Headquartered outside of Minneapolis, MN, it is twice the size of its closest competitor, Archer Daniels Midland. Even though the corporation employs more than 100,000 people in 59 countries, it maintains a low profile by keeping nearly 85 percent of its ownership in the founders’ families.

Cargill’s businesses span many areas, including grain, cotton, sugar, food processing, steelmaking, futures brokering, petroleum, and financial trading. Its brands include Sterling Silver (meat), Diamond Crystal (salt), and Honeysuckle White (poultry). Cargill Meat Solutions Inc., is the second-largest meat processor in the U.S.

A major supplier to companies such as McDonald’s, Kraft and Coke, Cargill’s influence over our food supply is significant. From seed to processing to packaging, Cargill has a corner on every stage of the agricultural food system. It controls 10 percent of the world’s salt production and 30 percent of Europe’s glucose and high-fructose corn syrup market. It is the largest cattle feeder in the U.S. and is the world’s second-largest phosphate fertilizer producer. Renessen, Cargill’s 50-50 joint venture with Monsanto, markets genetically engineered crops in the U.S., Asia, Europe and Latin America. Cargill Dow, Cargill and Dow’s 50-50 joint venture, produces packaging and fibers from corn plant sugar.

An Abusive Track Record

Deadly Products: In 2000, bacteria contaminated poultry at Cargill Turkey Products in Waco, Texas, resulted in four deaths, three miscarriages or stillbirths, and 28 cases of listeriosis. In 2000, Cargill Pork, a pig farm in Missouri, paid $1.55 million for illegally polluting a river with hog waste.

Genetically Engineered Risks: Cargill is a major exporter of genetically engineered crops. In 1998, Cargill accounted for 42 percent of U.S. corn exports and 31 percent of soybeans, two commonly genetically engineered crops. Cargill has been unwilling to support the separation of non-genetically engineered products from genetically engineered products, forcing many companies to buy genetically engineered food and ingredients.

In India, thousands of farmers have demonstrated against the corporation in response to Cargill’s fight for trade policies limiting farmers’ seed rights. The corporation continues to fight aggressively to fight for trade policies limiting farmers’ seed rights.

Global Reach

Cargill, through a front group called the Cargill Community Network (CCN), lobbied heavily for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and also had a hand in negotiations surrounding the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The corporation lobbies international institutions, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), to swing the agricultural market in its favor. After Cargill and other big agribusiness corporations pushed for the removal of trade barriers on genetically engineered food, the Bush Administration filed a complaint through the WTO against the European Union’s ban on genetically engineered crops.

Cargill is represented in many trade associations, including the American Meat Institute, Biotechnology Industry Organization, Grocery Manufacturers of America, and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development.

Power, Pressure and Persuasion

U.S. Influence: Cargill exerts its political influence through lobbying, campaign contributions, front groups and executives holding high-ranking federal appointments. Cargill reportedly spent $166,500 in campaign contributions in the 2002 election cycle, and more than $92,500 in 2004. Cargill executives have served in the Nixon, Reagan and second Bush administrations, particularly in trade advisory roles. Cargill’s Chair and CEO Warren Staley was appointed by George W. Bush to the President’s Export Council, which is composed of members of Congress, Cabinet officials and private sector representatives to promote the expansion of exports and advise the President on U.S. trade policy. President Bush also nominated Cargill’s Assistant Vice President for Public Affairs Daniel Pearson to the International Trade Commission to represent farmers.

Undermining Regulations: Cargill also wields enormous influence over national and international regulatory issues. Under pressure from Cargill, the U.S. Department of Agriculture overturned decades-old regulations designed to protect small farmers from financial loss. Cargill created a sub-group called Ohioans for Responsible Health Information that helped defeat a 1992 right-to-know initiative that would have created more transparency about toxic substances used statewide.
Concentrated Market Power and Agricultural Trade

“...We are the flour in your bread, the wheat in your noodles, the salt on your fries. We are the oil in your salad dressing and the beef, pork or chicken you eat for dinner. We are the cotton in your clothing, the backing on your carpet and the fertilizer in your field” (Cargill corporate brochure 2001).

Market power is the ability to affect price, to reduce competition and to set standards for a sector of economic activity. Market power is the ability to set customer prices above competitive levels (seller power) and/or the ability to set supplier prices below competitive levels (buyer power). Market power undermines competition. A firm with market power can increase its profits at the expense of its suppliers or customers or both. Market power is not the same as monopoly power. A monopoly exists when only one firm sells a particular good or service in a market. Monopolies (and monopsonies, when only one firm buys the good or service on offer) are easily identified; market power is more complex and not always so obvious.

The quote from Cargill above describes a company with significant market power. Cargill, privately owned and operated since 1865, has the largest terminal capacity of any company in the U.S. Along with its operations in the United States, Cargill can handle 23.9 million bushels of grain exports in Canada and 24.6 million bushels in Argentina and Brazil. Cargill alone exports 42 percent of the corn that leaves U.S. shores (and the U.S. supplies some two thirds of the world market). Cargill is among the top three beef producers in the United States, and plays an important role in poultry production. It owns and operates a worldwide transportation business, with ships, trucks, barges and railcars, as well as grain elevators for storage. Cargill owns NatureWorks, a company that produces plastics from plant based sugars that compete with oil-based polymers used in plastic wrap, disposable cups and cutlery, and as filler in pillows and mattresses. Sales and other revenues (gross income) has grown steadily and remarkably over the past five years and now exceed $70 billion.

Cargill’s website offers a second list of activities that expands still further the scope of the company’s market power, “...With ... a long history of trading in global financial and commodity markets, Cargill is a proprietary investor, alternative asset manager, broker-dealer and provider of risk management products and services.” (www.cargill.com 2005). In other words, Cargill is not just about selling and processing commodities—goods—but is also all about services: banking, loans, investment, currency deals, risk insurance, shipping and more.

Market power is not the same as just size; there are big firms that do not have much market power. In Cargill’s case, however, its scale and range of activities is an indicator of the kind of advantages Cargill has over many smaller and less diverse rival firms. Cargill illustrates one important dimension of market power in the agricultural sector: it offers a one-stop-shop for the farmer (or buyer) that makes it easy to do business with.

Cargill is one of several enormous firms in the commodity trading and processing sectors, alongside other giants such as Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge and Louis Dreyfus.
Eating up the Amazon

McDonald’s Chicken McNuggets are on the menu at McDonald’s in Barcelona, Hamburg, London, Marseille or Milan – the grub is so cheap and so universal you can easily forget the environmental cost of such food. McDonald’s has, after all, an explicit policy to protect rainforests by not buying beef from any recently deforested rainforest land. Who would think that these innocuous looking bits of chicken are helping to drive the destruction of the Amazon, one of the most biologically diverse rainforests on earth?

Yet the case of McDonald’s Chicken McNuggets is a clear and straightforward illustration of how the European food industry is implicated in fuelling the destruction of the Amazon for soya. Cargill controls every step of the chain from the soya farm in the Amazon to the food processing plants which produce the nuggets supplied to McDonald’s across Europe.

McDonald’s claims that ‘the preservation of tropical rainforest is a top priority’ and that it is ‘committed to establishing and enforcing responsible environmental practices.’ In addition, McDonald’s rainforest policy states: ‘McDonald’s does not, has not and will not permit destruction of tropical rain forests for our beef supply.’ What is not covered by this policy is the feed given to the chickens that end up as products such as Chicken McNuggets, or the cattle and pigs that are used to make other products.

Greenpeace investigations show that, despite its claims to be rainforest friendly, McDonald’s deep fat fryers are directly responsible for a trail of destruction right into the heart of the Amazon rainforest.

Liverpool is one of the UK’s busiest ports. In 2004 it imported nearly three million tons of animal feed. The national motorway network runs virtually to the dock gates, allowing quick and easy transport of feed to mills throughout the UK.

Brazilian export data shows that between March 2005 and February 2006, Cargill exported over 220,000 tons of Brazilian soya originating in the Amazonian states of Mato Grosso, Pará and Rondônia through its Santarém port to the UK – the majority to Liverpool.

Greenpeace has recently tracked the delivery of this soya from Cargill’s terminal in Liverpool to Cargill subsidiary Sun Valley. In conversations with two senior managers at Sun Valley, Greenpeace investigators confirmed that 25% of the feed used to feed Sun Valley chickens is Brazilian soya, which is supplied almost exclusively from the Cargill facility in Liverpool. Another 25% is a mix of ingredients including soya oil. The remaining 50% is mainly locally grown wheat.

Sun Valley Foods Europe

Cargill-owned Sun Valley is an example of integrated food production. Founded in 1960, the firm was bought by Cargill in 1980, and now operates across Europe. Sun Valley is a producer, marketer and distributor. It processes about 1 million chickens a week into fresh and frozen meat, as well as producing 250-300 tons a week of value-added products. Sun Valley’s biggest customers are McDonald’s and supermarket chain Morrisons.

Through separate McDonald’s business units in Wolverhampton and Orléans in France, Sun Valley is McDonald’s largest poultry supplier in Europe and the UK, supplying Chicken McNuggets and sandwich patties. The firm produces half of all chicken products used by McDonald’s across Europe.

Sun Valley also has its own brand of consumer products and supplies other retailers under their own brand names. Sun Valley has its own feed mill at the company’s integrated poultry production facility near Hereford, and produces feed including Brazilian soya imported through Cargill’s plant at Liverpool.
How Slow Food is nurturing a global grassroots movement to secure a good, clean and fair agricultural future

by Laura Sayre

“An environmentalist who is not a gastronome is sad; a gastronome who is not an environmentalist is silly.” —Carlo Petrini

Terra Madre 2006, Slow Food’s second biennial “world meeting of food communities,” was held in a cavernous glass-and-steel barn known as Lingotto Oval, built to host the speed-skating events for the 2006 Winter Olympics. For five days in the last week of October, some 8,000 small-scale farmers, herders, fishers, artisan food producers, food system activists, chefs and academics gathered here in the city of Turin, in the Piedmont region of northern Italy, to eat, drink, network and discuss how best to take over the world.

“The first Terra Madre was done pretty much on a wing and a prayer,” said Jeremy Brown, a fisherman from Bellingham, Washington, who attended in both 2004 and 2006. “This is a little bigger and a little more organized. Hopefully, this time we’ll come away with some steps for action.”

But Terra Madre itself is a step for action on the part of Slow Food—an attempt to broaden its focus from gastronomy to eco-gastronomy, to combat globalization with what Slow Food founder and President Carlo Petrini calls “virtuous globalization.” As in 2004, this year’s Terra Madre was held in collaboration with another, larger, Slow Food event, the biennial Salone del Gusto, or Exhibition of Taste. Terra Madre is a by-invitation only event; the Salone is a food fair, open to public.

The gap between Terra Madre and the Salone del Gusto is efficiently suggested by the colors of their respective promotional materials: Terra Madre is coded in earth brown, clay red and sunset yellow; the Salone in urban black, lime green and glam purple.

For 2006, Slow Food organizers strove to encourage more interaction between the two color schemes. There were a number of Terra Madre-themed panel discussions in the general Salone public; the two events were also physically adjacent, (in 2004 they were a couple of miles apart), so that Terra Madre participants could visit the Salone more easily. And a larger number of the stalls in the Salone were occupied by Slow Food “presidia,” producers’ groups organized around a distinctive food item recognized by Slow Food as being in need of protection and support. The new rallying cry of Slow Food is “good, clean, and fair.” Good stands for quality; clean for environmental responsibility and fair for social justice.

The inclusion of chefs and academics was also new this year, part of Slow Food’s explicit strategy to extend the movement’s influence. By reaching up and down the food chain—back to producers, out to consumers (or “co-producers,” as Petrini prefers to call them), into restaurant kitchens and dining halls—as well as laterally across the intellectual and activist communities, Slow Food hopes to create what one speaker called “the Internet of the sustainable agriculture movement,” a resilient network of opposition to the forces of homogeny in the contemporary global food system.

I attended as a member of the press, but I also (full disclosure) consider myself a member of that network and traveled with a delegation from eastern Pennsylvania. What follows are my impressions along with the reflections and observations of some of the many food producers, chefs, activists and academics I spoke with.

Terra Madre is, first of all, a tour de force: 4,803 food producers from 1,583 food communities in 150 countries on five continents; joined by 953 chefs, 411 academics representing 225 universities, and 776 volunteers to help things go smoothly. Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized some 1,500 special visas for conference attendees. Simultaneous translations of the proceedings were offered in English, German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Japanese. The housing arrangements alone were a small wonder, with delegates accommodated at nearly a thousand separate locations around Turin and the surrounding area, a fleet of buses transporting them back and forth to the conference each day.

Terra Madre is also utterly Italian. Everything looked stunning, nothing started on time, there were all kinds of rules but most of them went cheerfully unenforced. We were provided with tiny shots of free espresso throughout the day, courtesy of Lavazza, a major sponsor. Most importantly, the idea of gastronomy being presented was a complex blend of intellect and emotion, politics and pleasure. Carlo Petrini has reportedly been known to tell colleagues, “If you don’t know how to have fun, you might as well go home.”

From start to finish, there was a heavy emphasis on spectacle. The inauguration featured an a cappella performance by a group of Piedmontese women in red leggings and broad-brimmed straw hats, a procession of flags from 148 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe (what is it about an assembly of flags that brings our hearts to our throats?), and addresses from a dozen leaders and dignitaries, including Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. Uniformed guards stood at attention on either side of the podium, horsehair plumes hanging down their backs from shining helmets. Official Slow Food photographers and videographers swarmed through the room, documenting the diversity of the delegates—Masai herders with beaded neck ornaments, Tajikistani orchardists in finely embroidered tunics, Indonesian rice growers in long shirts and flat caps, Tibetan herders in woolly hats and scarves, German bakers in aprons, Welsh millers in plaid shirts and flat caps. The acronyms served as the lightning rods for these disagreements; the new rallying cry of Slow Food is “good, clean, and fair.”

Comparisons to the Olympics were inevitable. The Salone is held in Lingotto Fiore, a vast convention center built in and around a former Fiat factory just south of the old, 18th-century heart of Turin and one of the focal points of the 2006 Olympic Games. Some lucky delegates were housed in the Villaggio Olympico (Olympic Village), a tidy clutch of condos in brightly painted concrete linked to the Lingotto by a dramatic suspension footbridge.

Part of the genius of Terra Madre is its assertion that all the world’s farmers deserve the red-carpet treatment, deserve to be treated like royalty, to be invited to Italy and put up in hotels and taken out to dinner. The mayor of Turin, Sergio Chiamparino, spoke of “the dignity and value of all who work to produce food.” “The strong seed of Terra Madre is the practice of the local economy,” Petrini said. “It’s a film that is projected, for 12 billion people, when there are only 6.3 billion people living. Meanwhile, 800 million suffer from malnutrition and hunger. 1.7 billion suffer from obesity, and the rate of diabetes is growing exponentially along with cardiovascular diseases caused by malnutrition.... It’s madness to continue to ask more from the land.”

The first lesson of Terra Madre was that we in the United States are not at the center of the global sustainable agriculture movement—not, perhaps, should we be. “I think it will be difficult for us in the so-called developed world to become the standard-bearers in combating the economy of the market,” Petrini observed in his opening address. “We are accomplices, we are participants, and you, you citizens living in the so-called underdeveloped world must show us the way, the way of an economy for a relocalization of consumption and a relocalization of agricultural production.”

As this suggests, Terra Madre is not all peace and love and good feeling. Although the sense of common ground was palpable and genuine, you can’t bring farmers from all over the world together in a room and expect them to agree on everything. The biggest gaff, not surprisingly, was between the “developed” world and the “developing” world, the rich countries and the poor countries. Two acronyms served as the lightning rods for these tensions: GMO and WTO.

Among the many eloquent spokespersons for the developing country perspective was Ammata Traoré, a sociologist and activist from Mali. At the opening ceremony Traoré challenged the European and U.S. delegates to recognize the causal relationship between agricultural subsidies and immigration: dumping on world markets depresses commodity prices, making it impossible for small farmers in poor countries to compete, prompting them to flee their countries in search of work in the rich world, where they become the victims of racism and xenophobia. “Africa is paying for the macroeconomic decisions of the rich countries,” she added later. “Mali’s best land is in cotton, and yet most Africans wear the second-hand clothes of
the North. When I was little, where I grew up you could buy fresh milk. Now there is only powdered milk.” (The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity is supporting Traoré’s efforts to rehabilitate a traditional farmers’ market in Mali’s capital city of Bamako.)

In one of the breakout sessions, agroecologist Miguel Altieri made a similar argument with respect to the Western Hemisphere. He lamented that organic agriculture is starting to look more like conventional agriculture than sustainable agriculture, which is better approximated by the traditional agricultural systems First World agricultural policies are threatening to destroy. Is the goal of organics just “so that the countries in the South can produce good clean food for the countries of the North?” he asked. “No, it should also be to produce good clean food for the South.” The traditional knowledge of indigenous agricultural producers is of enormous value in understanding agricultural producers worldwide. It’s a “global grassroots movement.” Alice Waters suggested, advocating “universal public education in eco-gastronomy.”

On the plane flying to Italy, my question was, is Slow Food fundamentally a food movement or a farming movement? And can the two be brought together? As most readers probably know, the group that became Slow Food was founded in 1986 as a gesture of protest against (non-virtuous) globalization, symbolized by the opening of a McDonald’s near the Piazza di Spagna in Rome. Over the past 20 years, Slow Food has built a global network of supporters and emerged as political force in Europe. In the United States, however, it has largely been seen as a kind of sophisticated dinner club, its members mostly urban-based, their activities centered on savoring meals at fine restaurants.

Together, Terra Madre and the Salone del Gusto challenge those assumptions. If the Salone seemed like a mainstream commercial event compared to the earnest discussions at Terra Madre, considered on its own it had to be acknowledged as a remarkable phenomenon. In contrast to, say, the Organic Trade Association’s All Things Organic event, held simultaneously with the Fancy Food Show in Chicago, the Salone seemed to be overwhelmingly attended by ordinary Italian individuals and families, not by “members of the trade” -- chefs, shop owners, food distributors. You could barely move through the surging, tasting, talking, purchasing masses. More than 100,000 people passed through the turnstiles in the first three days alone. A long list of “Taste Workshops,” priced from €12 to €70 ($15-89), on subjects ranging from the fish of the Adriatic to the wild snails of the Piedmont mountains to the goat cheeses of Spain, were booked out well in advance of the event and offered (if the one I was able to get into, hosted by a winemaker from the Lake Garda area, was any example) a congenial and genuinely informative education in taste. There were free tasting classrooms available to school groups and pricier guided dinners (€35-120) at noted restaurants.

A key aspect of Slow Food’s success, in other words, has been its ability to tap into an enormous --date we say insatiable--demand for gastronomical knowledge among the general public, and by doing so to fulfill its stated objective of raising people’s appreciation for food quality. The “taste education” activities of the Salone are continued year-round, across Italy, through a series of 23 “master of food” courses aimed at laypeople—not chefs—interested in expanding their understanding of topics such as cured meats or tea or spices. For more specialized study, Slow Food has joined with the region of Piedmont to open an accredited, private University of Gastronomic Sciences, offering an undergraduate and two graduate degree programs. These are all significant steps toward Waters’ vision of broad-based public education in gastronomical husbandry, and must certainly go a long way toward changing people’s shopping and eating habits.

Jeremy Brown, the Washington fisherman, is an example of a U.S. producer who’s successfully absorbed Slow Food’s lesson. After struggling “for a bunch of years” to eke out a livelihood in mainstream markets, he began focusing on quality and selling direct. “Eventually I realized that the food movement had so much to offer in terms of organizing and making food my business has to eat. Not even Bill Gates can get somebody to eat for him.”

Terra Madre was challenging. I heard a certain amount of groaning about the program’s length and conference organization, particularly with regard to the “Earth Workshops,” which tended to be long, broad in focus and loosely moderated (at least by American standards). Sessions featured as many as 16 speakers, none of whom were listed on any printed program, pretty well ruling out the possibility of question and answer time and making it impossible to pop strategically from workshop to workshop.

As with most conferences, though, some of the best discussions took place outside the formal sessions. Nancy Ranney, who raises grass-fed beef on a family ranch in the highlands of central New Mexico, said she had met Tom Delehanty, an organic chicken producer in the Rio Grande Valley, for the first time at Terra Madre. Heidi Busse, an employee of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture who came with a group of Wisconsin artisan cheesemakers, said on day four that her group had had mixed success connecting with their counterparts from other countries. But they were still glad they came. “It’s not that often I get to sit up late talking agricultural policy with people of this caliber,” said Meghan Sedarin of the Vermont Fresh Network, a nonprofit group linking farmers and restaurants, after a night of doing just that back at the hotel with a group of delegates from Vermont, Maine, New York and California.

Many delegates use Terra Madre as an opportunity to do some traveling elsewhere in northern Italy, either before or after the conference. Enid New Mexico, said she had met Tom Delehanty, a chef from central Jersey planned a tour to Bologna and Venice. Several people I met had taken time out from the conference to visit the nearby town of Alba, famous for its tartufi bianchi, or white truffles, which reach their peak season in October and are honored with an annual festival. By the end of the weekend everyone was yearning to get out into the countryside, to see how all this translated onto the rural landscape.

But there was plenty of traveling to do within the conference itself. The Terra Madre organizers had set aside a small area of the Oval as an “agora,” a sort of information booth. It was attended by the afternoon of the second day the displays and stalls set up here had spread out to fill most of the remaining open area in the center of the exhibition hall not being used for workshops. Many of the complementary, non-food items of local economy were on display here: wood carvings, woven baskets, felted bags. Women from Guinea brought beautiful indigo-dyed batik cotton fabrics next to Diné master weavers from Arizona exhibiting rugs made from Navajo-Churro wool. A chef from the Republic of Georgia held a table of格鲁吉亚 bottled wines while talking about his efforts to create a culinary training program in Brazzaville.

Some critics charge that what Slow Food’s been best at is promoting itself—and it’s true that the Slow

Paolo de Castro, Italy’s Minister of Agriculture, addresses the assembly.
Sicily, how the presidium designation had affected the tiny island of Ustica, off the northern coast of Italy—so vibrantly on display at the Salone—should not be taken for granted. Certainly, Slow Food wouldn’t be where it is today without the support of the Italian government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Fondazione CRT, a Turin-based philanthropic foundation. But those relationships—and the underlying understanding that a vibrant local agriculture can have economic benefits for an entire region, preserving aesthetic and environmental values, retaining a sense of place and attracting tourists—have been nurtured and supported by the efforts of people like Carlo Petrini. They didn’t just happen by virtue of some cultural magic.

In terms of blueprints for future action, Terra Madre has advanced hand in hand with another initiative, the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture, undertaken by many of the same individuals. Launched in 2003 with the support of the regional government of Tuscany and under the chairwomanship of Vandana Shiva, the Commission has produced two manifestos, one “On the Future of Food” and a second “On the Future of Seeds.” Both are powerfully eloquent statements of the urgency of our global situation, the signs of hope and the necessary corrective steps, including international trade rule revisions, land reform and the recognition of farmers’ rights to collective genetic resources.

For many participants, the preservation of biodiversity is the essential point Slow Food stands for, the cause that unites all its disparate elements. When Michael Pollan took the podium at the opening ceremony, he characterized the audience as “a parliament of species,” a representative body for the world’s agricultural biodiversity. Today, he lamented, “just eight species account for three-quarters of the world’s food”—a mere thimbleful of DNA on which to hang the future of the human race.

This is not a sentimental argument, argued Marcello Buiatti of the University of Florence: “Biodiversity should not be preserved because it is nice, or because we are good people. No. It should be preserved because without it we will die. By 2100, in the lifetime of our grandchildren, we will have huge problems if we don’t figure out how to change the trends that are currently in motion.” “I’m a geneticist, so I know that everything changes; everything adapts; there is no optimum in life. Human beings should not be optimized.” In this topsy-turvy world, Buiatti suggested, “What matters is not wealth but money.” To fight back, “We must remember that we are alive.”

The essence of Terra Madre, after all, is appreciation for taste. The Natural Farmer

Food ‘brand’ is proving wildly successful. The group now boasts 83,000 members in 65 countries worldwide, with national offices in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France, Japan, Britain and the United States. The for-profit Slow Food Editore churns out dozens of books a year, including the annual Vini d’Italia (Italian Wines), first published in 1987 and now considered the authoritative guide on the subject. From the website and the quarterly journal to the t-shirts and the tote bags, everything Slow Food produces has a stylish professionalism that bespeaks money as well as talent. It’s a bit like Black Sports Gear—an ‘anti-brand’ promoted using many of the same tools invented by the corporations it sets out to critique.

Like any successful brand, moreover, the idea of ‘slow’ has been proliferating in every direction. Città Slow (“Slow City”), founded in 1999, is a network of towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants who are trying to preserve local traditions and tempering the impact of globalization through measures like restrictions on motor vehicle use in historic centers. Slow Fish, another biennial food gathering (held in odd-numbered years, to alternate with the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre), hosted by the coastal city of Genoa and offering tastings, educational workshops, debates and meetings related to sustainable seafood and the wise use of marine resources. The town of Brà, where Slow Food is headquartered, hosts an international risotto cheese exhibition, also in odd-numbered years. Other major Slow Food events have been in held in Germany, Kenya and Australia.

There was something slightly unsettling about the way this brand-consciousness seemed to extend itself over every aspect of the event, or even the movement. The larger-than-life banners featuring the faces of Terra Madre 2004 participants, the richly colored images of food and farmers worldwide that decorated the walls, felt like invitations to consume the surfaces of things. I saw Rick Knoll, a California farmer whose long white-blond hair and deeply lined face was one of those that had appeared on a t-shirt bloomed with a “Beyond Organic™” logo; Slow Food Nation™ has evidently also been trademarked. In our mediatuned culture, is there no popular idea—no matter how sizable or inscrutable to a cool postcard or a catchy t-shirt design?

Similarly, the presidia booths within the Salone were by their very nature ripped from their local context, which could only be represented by photos and brochures, by lists of ingredients and descriptions of processing methods. Walking through the Salone felt like walking through a famous museum, trying to spend a few minutes absorbing each installation but never feeling like you could spend enough time with any. Perhaps what this comes down to, in the words of a L.A. Times film critic, Harry N. Gittens, is that Slow Food embodies the many “paradoxes of celebrating local products on a global scale.” Those paradoxes are not just intellectual; they have real consequences. In a public session on the work of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Maria Grazia Mammuccini, director of a Tuscan organic farm, asked that local products on global markets have negative effects. “Access to wider markets,” she explained, “can boost demand beyond the limits of the farms’ capacity, tempting outsiders to make the most of the opportunity by introducing cheaper imitations, damaging quality standards and the livelihoods of traditional farmers.”

Slow Food has tried to be careful to avoid these outcomes. Since 2004, the first year of the Salone, three-quarters of the stalls were held by merchants, one-quarter by producers; this year, that ratio was reversed. But as the recent history of organic shows, larger companies will eventually try to imitate the successful marketing models of smaller producers. Petrini hasn’t ruled out the possibility of some kind of Slow Food certification system; in a sense, the presidio already function this way. When I asked Vito Barbera, a grower of lentils on the tiny island of Ustica, off the northern coast of Sicily, how the presidium designation had affected his community, his response was unequivocally positive: “When the presidium was created eight years ago, lentil production on Ustica was almost gone. Now there are about 20 hectares in cultivation, with a production of up to 20,000 kilos a year.”

So is Slow Food shamelessly capitalizing on Italy’s rich gastronomical legacy? Well, yes and no. It might be more accurate to say the group is doing so proudly and passionately. A person could be forgiven for wondering what there could possibly be to worry about with regard to food system health relative to the situation in the United States. A few weeks back, in Pennsylvania, I met an American woman who became a member of local CSA after returning from a couple of years’ residence in Italy. “Isn’t all vegetable production in Europe pretty much organic?” she asked, in utter seriousness.

Well, no. Had I known about it at the time, I would have suggested she see a new documentary by Austrian filmmaker Nikolaus Geyrhalter titled “Unser Taglich Brot” (“Our Daily Bread”). This was the lead film at Turin’s Ninth Environmental Film Festival (Festival Cinemambiente), which by chance I had discovered was going on at the same time as the Terra Madre gathering. A group of delegates and I managed to find our way there, and we were floored. It’s everything the new “Fast Food Nation” movie isn’t: a 92-minute film with no script or dialogue or subtitles, just a series of camera-steady views of various segments of Europe’s industrial food chain in action: a chicken hatchery, a fish-processing plant, a greenhouse tomato operation, a field of sunflowers. Luckily, we had just eaten at a vegetarian restaurant, but that didn’t save us from contemplating the fate of the herbicides sprayed so generously through the greenhouses, the bare-armed workers harvesting a few days or weeks later, the repetitive motion injuries that must result from making the same slice across the necks of chickens all day. One suspects that the European abattoirs are better regulated in terms of worker safety than their American equivalents, but that doesn’t stop them from being dehumanizing and demoralizing.

But the deeper lesson is that the remarkable strength of small-scale, traditional agriculture in Italy—so vibrantly on display at the Salone—should in no way be taken for granted. Certainly, Slow Food wouldn’t be where it is today without the support of the Italian government, especially the regional Piedmont authorities and the city of Turin. Additional support for Terra Madre came from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the
Consider the Alcornoque Purreddu melon of Sicily, a white-fleshed, green-skinned melon traditionally harvested in the summer and stored for winter eating. Or the yacca of Argentina, an indigenous root grown in rotation with corn or potatoes, eaten raw or used to make sweets. Or the hundred local varieties of basmati rice, threatened with extinction in its native regions of India by modern hybrids and the excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides. To learn about these things is to enlarge the scope of one’s eco-gastronomical imagination, one’s understanding of the possible relationships between people and their environment.

Traditional agricultural systems also have practical impacts on local ecologies, and by extension economies. In a session on mobile stock rearing, a shepherd from Spain talked about the importance of traditional nomadic shepherding to the maintenance of plant biodiversity in Spain—and indeed in Europe, since Spain has been a center of European botanical diversity since the last Ice Age. The late 20th-century shift to moving animals by truck or train instead of on foot has endangered traditional landscapes by altering the timing of the animals’ movements. Herds moved by foot also serve as conduits for plant species’ migration; movement that could become critical as global warming forces species to find new homes.

A researcher from the Isle of Man, between Britain and Ireland, explained how a return to the island’s traditional Loghtan sheep was essential to the preservation of its pastures and by extension of its whole economy. “This animal really looks after the whole island. The modern breeds destroy the old pastures, even when they’re grazed in fewer numbers.” The traditional sheep produces high-quality meat and wool, and “is attractive to visitors” with its four horns, small size and brown coat, thus “helping to revitalize what is otherwise a dying [agricultural economy].”

After Italy, the United States has the largest number of Slow Food members of any country, and most of it’s members are in a newly-formed Terra Madre delegation. The U.S. Regional Meeting filled the Oval’s biggest meeting room to capacity, with 43 states, 21 sovereign nations and some 500 small-scale producers represented. Slow Food USA Executive Director Erika Lesser announced that planning was underway for Slow Food Nation, the first nationwide U.S. meeting of Slow Food communities and an attempt to replicate the success of Terra Madre on a national level. The gathering is scheduled for May 1-4, 2008, in San Francisco, with the expectation that it will move to other parts of the country in subsequent years.

There are dozens of Slow Food convivia in every region of the U.S., many of them with strong and meaningful connections to sustainable producers’ groups. Gary Paul Nabhan spoke about his efforts to “find ways to connect traditional agricultural systems to landscape conservation,” including his work with RAFT (Renewing America’s Food Traditions), which has compiled its own catalogue of 1,500 unique North American foods. Don’t be fooled into thinking that America is too young or too culturally diverse to have distinctive, place-specific food traditions, Nabhan emphasized. Instead, “Ask yourself, what is American terroir?”

But the real key to giving new force to the Slow Food movement in the United States, the speakers agreed, was to learn from the Italian insistence that eco-gastronomy is about the union of pleasure and politics. “We all have memories of food,” observed David Mas Masumoto, “the question is, do we have memories of food as a political force?” The union of the environmental and sustainable agriculture movements has already produced a powerful new coalition in America, Michael Pollan pointed out: inviting the culinary movement into the mix could produce a yet more formidable force. A formidable force is what we need; if we can pursue our political goals through sensory enjoyment, so much the better.

**Terra Madre Food Communities from the NOFA region:**

**Terra Madre** recognizes ‘food communities’ as a way of organizing small-scale, high-quality food producers around the world. Food communities are defined either by territory—all the producers in a defined area—or by product—producers over a broad area linked by their association with a given food product or agricultural system. This list in no way represents all the potential food communities in the Northeast; only those that have registered with Slow Food for the purposes of attending Terra Madre 2006.

**Connecticut:**
- Cornwall Hollow Breeders
- Cromwell Vegetable Growers
- New Britain Organic Farmers
- Tea Purveyors

**Massachusetts:**
- Berkshire and Taconic Region Biodynamic Farmers
- Cape Cod Hook Fisherman
- Martha’s Vineyard Aquaculturists
- Waltham Organic Farmers

**New Hampshire:**
- Hancock Educators
- Lebanon Heirloom Apple Growers and Cider Producers
- New Hampshire Farmers
- New Jersey:
  - Cape May Oyster Harvesters
  - Central New Jersey Ice Cream Makers and Vegetable Growers
  - Vernon Artisan Bakers and Cheesemakers

**New York:**
- Brooklyn Seed savers and Gardeners
- Brooklyn Urban Farmers
- Catskills Region Agriculture Promoters
- East Meredith Pig and Turkey Farmers
- Hudson Valley Agricultural Educators
- New York City Greenmarket Farmers
- New York City Organic Producers
- Norwich Dairy Farmers
- Westchester County Farmers, Chefs and Educators

**Rhode Island:**
- Rhode Island Dairy Farmers

**Vermont:**
- Burlington Farmers
- South Londonderry Organic Vegetable and Herb Growers
- Upper Connecticut River Valley Meat Producers
- Vermont Bread Bakers
- Vermont Farmers and Consumers
- Vermont Maple Syrup Producers
- Vermont Organic Producers
- Vermont Wild Food Gatherers

**Multiple Locations:**
- Honey Producers
- Native American Indigenous Delegation

**Partners:**
- Food Justice
- Renewing America’s Food Traditions

*Designates a Slow Food Presidium."
In the summer of 2003 I had a summer internship in Eastern Indonesia studying the relationship of subsistence farming to the global economy. Coffee and vanilla were the two export crops on which I focused most of my attention. I grew up in Timor and speak Indonesian, so talking to farmers and traveling in Eastern Indonesia was convenient. This article is an account of visits with farming communities in Alor and East Timor which grew coffee and vanilla to be sold on the global market.

Vanilla Production in Apui, Alor, Indonesia

6/20/03, 6:00 am: I am in the port town of Kalabahi, Alor waiting for a jeep which will be my ride to the mountain village of Apui; a jolting three hour trip. The purpose of the visit is to learn more about the vanilla growing operation in the mountains of Alor and how the growers are coping with an increasing global demand for their product.

Upon arrival in Apui we see a sign reading: “APUI: Alam Pesona Unik Indah” (Apui: Nature’s Enchantment Picturesque and Beautiful). After signing the guestbook, I head out with Pak (Mr.) Jon the driver from Kalabahi who is also Apui’s secretary, and Bpk. (Father) Sefnat Selan the local pastor to speak with vanilla growers and farmer’s group members. Out of the mid-day heat we sit in Bpk. Sefnat’s living room; cool and dark with the packed earth floor. A few farmers join the conversation.

One farmer spoke of vanilla as a reliable cash crop: “If we plant, care for (nourish), and store our vanilla, the money comes in”. The other main cash crops in Apui are betel nut, coffee, and nutmeg. Vanilla, however, is by far the most profitable. According to the farmers, it is not very labor intensive.
intensive and does not require much maintenance, yet can bring in up to $52 per kilo for dried beans. One man said this was enough to pay the expenses of his children’s school fees. He did not need to make much income besides what he made by selling vanilla. Most of the residents of Apui are considered subsistence farmers, so besides these few cash crops, most farmers also grow the usual crops to keep their families fed: corn, cassava, coconut, bananas, and vegetables. Most families also keep some livestock or chickens around.

I asked what farmers here use vanilla for. After a brief silence and a few shrugs, one farmer piped up “well, sometimes I put a dried bean in my closet to keep my clothes smelling fresh.” There is not much use for vanilla in Apui. It is not an ingredient in local cooking, unlike in the United States. They said that other uses for vanilla are perfume, and an ingredient in medicine.

Before farmer cooperatives were formed in Alor, farmers were marketing their product on their own and were selling vanilla for as low as 3 dollars a kilo. With a little initial help from a few universities in Kupang, Bali, and Texas, the farmer’s of Apui were able to improve their vanilla quality and become more effective on the global market. The agriculture department at the Artha Wacana Christian University in Kupang, Timor designed a solar drying oven for vanilla beans to be used in Apui. The dried beans could then be stored until the price for beans was high. A group of students from Texas A&M University provided the village with a satellite phone which they could use to contact a buyer in Bali who would help them get the best price for their beans. Unfortunately, Pak. Jon informed me, the battery for the cell phone died, and a new one is a 2 day trip away; in Kupang.

At this point the mid-day sun was wearing off, so we walked out to see where the vanilla is grown. As we walked Sefnat showed me an intricate bamboo pipe irrigation system which led from a creek down hill to where the rows of vanilla were growing. He told me; “the villagers of Apui are helping to store water so the vanilla crop stays fertile.” In Alor vanilla must be grown on a water retaining tree known as Dedap Putih so that it can continue to receive moisture throughout the dry season. I was surprised to find that vanilla is in the orchid family. One farmer informed me that it grows three years before it flowers and is able to produce fruit.

Pak Jon then shared a brief history of how vanilla arrived in Apui. To the Alorese, there are two recognized varieties of vanilla; “natural” and Balanese. Balanese vanilla was brought to Apui in the 1960’s by a teacher. On the other hand, “The natural vanilla appeared in a place never touched by the hand of man; it was placed there by God,” says Pak Jon. This “natural” vanilla never produces usable fruit in the wild. He went on to say that vanilla is in the orchid family, it originated and was grown in Mexico until brought to the old world after the conquest. Vanilla is a member of the orchid family. It originated and was grown in Mexico until brought to the world after the conquest.
Vanilla growing on a farm in New Guinea

tell me that vanilla growing in Madagascar and Mexico has birds and butterflies that help pollinate the vanilla, but in Alor the pollination must be performed by humans. According to local myth, the villagers of Apui prayed to God often, and one day, in a vision, a man was taught how to manually pollinate or “marry” the vanilla plant to make it grow harvestable fruit. For the people of Apui, just as birds and butterflies are facts of nature, so are visions from God.

At the outskirts of the rows and rows of vanilla lies a rounded altar and a monument reading: “Vanilla harvest in Apui, South Alor by the Regent of Alor: Ans Takalapeta.” The Alter is a low circular walled occupation in East Timor is still very prevalent here acts as a leader and guardian in the family community in the mountains of East Timor where coffee is a well established crop. The Portuguese planted it here when East Timor was still a Portuguese colony. The coffee is shade grown, and now certified organic. In 1995, though prices were still low, farmer cooperatives began to form with the support of NCBA who promoted organic coffee growing techniques because it was more profitable to farmers.

The mid 90’s was a time when farmers in other parts of Indonesia were chopping down their coffee trees because they weren’t profitable, and were in fact bad for the soil. Coffee is a very labor intensive crop to the subsistence farmer. The coffee cherries must be picked red, husked (usually with mortar
the Portuguese influence was strongly felt: adobe and mortar and pestle). Most subsistence farmers I know don’t even drink that much coffee, because it is such a laborious crop to harvest. However, with a new drying facility built with funding from USAID, Maubessi farmers are able to grow and sell their coffee for a decent price.

Accompanied by my father John, and Antón a legal aid worker, we made the day trip to Maubessi from the coastal town of Dili. Driving into Maubessi, the Portuguese influence was strongly felt: adobe homes, a Catholic church celebrating their Saint’s Day, and “Rosa De La Montanya Café” in the center of town. It seemed as if the whole town was out in the streets celebrating their Saint’s Day with dancing, drums, bells, and cheering.

Our first stop in Maubessi was Cooperativa Café Timor (CCT), the USAID sponsored coffee cooperative and drying plant. Since becoming organically certified, a certifier from the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) comes to the CCT drying plant once a year to insure organic standards are being met. At the CCT I spoke with Edu, the plant manager. He explained the general process for drying coffee beans. Farmers with membership to the CCT bring their beans in and are paid 15 cents a kilo for their red beans. The red beans go into a husking machine which removes the skin and spits out coffee beans to be washed in a series of tubs. Workers are paid $3.00 a day to wash the beans, sweeping them down channels and into cleaning tubs. The final tub of beans is emptied into a truck bed, which drives the beans several hundred feet to be dried on tarps. The left over coffee skins are left to compost for 2 years to be used as organic fertilizer by farmers. Members have free access to compost.

The coffee cleaning tubs were built as a filtration system to lessen the hazardous effects of the coffee waste water. Before the filtration system was built, villagers down stream were experiencing skin irritations, and their livestock was dying from drinking the polluted stream water. An ordinance was passed by the (at the time, Indonesian) government forcing the CCT to build a system to filter the water before returning it to the stream. Though the coffee beans are organic, the husks carry certain natural toxins which can be harmful to humans and animals which come in contact with them.

Edu also told me that the CCT used to have a drying plant in Luquias and Aifuf (2 other villages in East Timor, but those plants were forced to close due to threats by the local militias. He did not go into further details about the closed plants. However, Edu’s information is evidence of the difficulty in trying to build a stable economy in East Timor.

After speaking with Edu and a few of the young men working at the CCT, we went down the hill a ways to speak with another coffee cooperative which Antón’s legal aid group had helped start up. This group was named Kulhatel, and they were much smaller than the CCT with only 92 card carrying members. The member’s said that although there were only 92 card holders, often families would share the card among themselves. Unlike the CCT workers who were paid a daily wage, the members of Kulhatel volunteered their time to wash and husk beans. Speaking to Kulhatel members, I got a better sense of how the farmers in Maubessi felt about selling coffee to a global market then I did speaking to workers at the CCT.

Farmers explained that their coffee crops were a mixed blessing. In one sense, this was their largest cash crop and enabled them to afford basic household supplies; however, because coffee was so acidic, a lot of the soil in Maubessi was too poor to grow basic foods that most subsistence farmers in Timor grew: corn, cassava, vegetables, kidney beans, garlic, potatoes, carrots and so on. Because their soil was in poor condition, these farmers were forced to buy their food from farmers in other villages. Many of the farmers at Kulhatel also sold coffee to the CCT, because although they liked the autonomy of their group, being a CCT member was the only way they could get healthcare for their families. USAID has sponsored a healthcare clinic in Maubessi where members of the CCT can receive basic health care for free.

Coffee growers in East Timor face an unsteady political and economic system. They are caught up in a whirlwind of international aid, building a new nation, negotiating a new government, and most of all, healing the wounds of a 25 year violent military occupation. Antón explained that his legal aid group had more land dispute cases then they could handle. After a military occupation, families were torn apart, and property boundaries had been manipulated and crossed hands multiple times. In a place where farmers don’t even know that the land they are farming will be theirs the next growing season, building a steady farming economy is a challenge.
Some Reflections

Back home in West Timor, I had the space of mind to reflect on my experiences in Alor and East Timor. This is what I wrote in the journal I filled that summer:

"7/7/03: In Alor, the religious aspect of growing and selling vanilla struck me. The farmers took great pride in the fact that their high quality vanilla was a gift to them from God. They had taken traditional agricultural ceremonies, filtered it through a Christian lens, and applied it to a modern capitalist model. For example: there was the alter on the outskirts of the vanilla gardens where villagers held ceremonies before harvesting, planting, or selling their crop.

The case of East Timor and its coffee production is still a mystery to me. It strikes me as odd: What is USAID doing in Maubessi, involved in a coffee cooperative and funding a health clinic? Maubessi is a place that seems so close to the international market, and at the same time so removed. I’ve heard the term ‘the poverty of aid’ and I’m not sure what it’s supposed to mean, but if anywhere was suffering from ‘the poverty of aid’ it would be East Timor.”

To judge the effects of globalization, I have concluded, we must look at its local impacts. Higher standards for fair trade or a better price for coffee or vanilla on the international market won’t necessarily be better for the growers. An international agreement on fair trade may be helpful to some degree, but does not account for local differences. The farmers of Apui, Alor have done well for themselves selling their vanilla to a global market, while the farmers in Maubessi, East Timor, have a long way to go before they are able to make a comfortable living off of growing and selling coffee.

Post script - In March of 2006 the East Timorese military was disbanded by Mari Alkatiri (who is now in exile and no longer the Prime Minister). Shooting has broken out in the Capitól Dili several times since the military’s disbandment. Many of Dili’s residents have fled back to villages where they have begun farming again. The people of East Timor are subsisting from their land, but in the 4 years since their independence have not been able to create a steady central government. The Australian and United Nations presence in East Timor is still strong, yet there is international skepticism that their presence is constructive.

Links to web sites related to this article - Apui: http://www.alor-island.com/english/General%20information/placeoin/place_o_interest.htm http://www.alor-island.com/english/commodities/agricul/vanilla.htm


Maria Soares

"Coffee is a very good crop for us. We are members of the coffee cooperative, and they give us a good price. Because they buy our coffee fruit, we don’t have to process it. We expanded our coffee farm two years ago, and we will plant more seedlings this year."

- Maria Soares

Maria Soares and her family harvest coffee on their highland farm in the village of Raimerhei located in the central mountains of East Timor, southeast Asia’s poorest country. Their local organic coffee cooperative is part of Cooperativa Cafe Timor (CCT), the largest single-source producer of organically certified coffee in the world. With support from USAID, CCT began buying, processing, and marketing certified organic coffee in East Timor in 1994, when it started with 800 farm families.

By helping farmers focus on quality and consistency, CCT commands a high price on the world specialty coffee market for its products. When farmers like Maria sell their ripe coffee fruit to CCT, they receive a premium price of between 40% and 75% more than they would selling their coffee to other producers in East Timor. They also save up to two weeks’ work needed to process coffee fruit into dried coffee beans, giving them time to harvest more of their crop.

CCT now has 20,000 farm family members and employs more than 3,000 East Timorese in post-harvest work each year. CCT’s USAID-supported activities include primary healthcare, agricultural extension services, vanilla crop and farmer-based cattle fattening projects to diversify exports, a tree nursery to provide replacement shade tree seedlings to coffee farmers, and a training center for cooperatives and small businesses.

New addition to our video library:

Raising and Slaughtering Homestead Hogs with John Stein

0600, 28 minutes - Watch an on-farm butcher in Gill, Massachusetts kill and clean a pig while discussing why and how he is performing each step. (Contains graphic images of livestock slaughter and butchering.)

Please send me this video. I enclose $15 in the form of a check to “NOFA Video Project”

NOFA Video Project, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005

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Fifty years ago, the United States was the largest agricultural exporter, doing about $3 billion in sales per year. Six of its top ten customers were in Western Europe; two more – Japan and Canada – also were developed countries; India, a food aid recipient, and pre-Castro Cuba were the only developing countries that were major markets.

Today, U.S. agricultural exports top $50 billion a year. Six of its top ten customers are developing countries, and three-fourths of U.S. agricultural exports go to Asia and the Americas.

There have been three transforming events during that half-century that reshaped this global agricultural market. The first was the formation of the European Community and the creation of its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP’s generous farm supports took the EC from a 20-million-ton-per-year net grain importer in the 1960s to a 20-million-ton-per-year net grain exporter by the 1980s.

The second transforming event was the collapse of the centrally planned economies, particularly the former Soviet Union. At their peak, the USSR and the PRC were importing 40-50 million tons of grain per year. Today those countries are net grain exporters.

The third transforming event was the emergence of developing countries as commercial grain importers. They have absorbed the 80-plus million tons of grain imports erased by the other two events. While total world grain trade has grown little in the last few decades, these events have shifted grain trade patterns dramatically. Quite simply, the future for world grain trade depends upon the rate of growth in food demand in the developing world.

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Vietnam rice farmer and French army. Other transforming forces of the past century were war and imperialism. Here a Vietnamese farmer plows for rice, seemingly ignoring a column of French army troops.
The Landless Workers Movement: The Difficult Construction of a New World

by Raúl Zibechi | September 26, 2006
translated from: Movimiento de los trabajadores sin tierra: la difícil construcción de un mundo nuevo
translated by: Nick Henry

“Breaking down the fences of the large estates was not as difficult as fighting the technological packages of the transnationals,” Huli recounts as he sits in his kitchen and pours hot water into the mate we share while his son romps around the house. He says the campesinos of Brazil’s Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (MST, for the Portuguese initials) dreamed for years of reclaiming their land, believing that it would solve all their problems: food for their children, a dignified life of hard work on the farm, education, health, and housing. However, the reality would prove much more difficult, for surprises they had never imagined lay ahead.

Huli Zang is part of one of the 376 families that make up the Filhos de Sepé (Sons of Sepé) settlement, a 6,000-hectare (23-square mile) municipality in Viamão, 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Porto Alegre, the capital of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. The settlement, established in February of 1999, is divided into four sectors that are grouped together in one area rather than on each campesino’s parcel of land.

This arrangement ensures the houses, built solidly out of wood or brick, have access to electricity and potable water, with the byproduct that daily life for the campesinos is much like that of the average city-dweller. Huli’s house has a gas stove as well as a wood stove, a refrigerator, television, and computer. There is a route connecting the housing area to the nearest town, Viamão, as well as the individual parcels, each one an average of 17 hectares.

The settlement sits next to a 2,500-hectare (10-square mile) wildlife refuge called Bañado dos Pachecos, home to thousands of species of birds, fish, and mammals. The area is irrigated by the surrounding marshland, which makes it suitable only for cultivating rice, although next to each house settlers have enough space to grow vegetables and fruit trees, and nearly everyone raises chickens and a milk cow or two. This allows some degree of self-sufficiency as far as food is concerned.

Within the settlement MST operates one of its Training Centers, which can house 120 people with its array of bedrooms, communal bathrooms, meeting rooms, Internet computer labs, and dining hall. During the month of August, some 80 activists from half a dozen countries participated in a seminar delivered each year by the Latin American Coordinating Agency of Campesino Organizations (CLOC). The 1,800-person village also has a school where 230 children attend.

Land and Rice

Before resettling to their current location, the landless campesinos lived for nearly four years alongside Brazil’s highways in hovels made of black canvas, enduring extreme cold during the winter and suffocating temperatures in the summer. Negotiations with authorities gave them access to the land they live on now, which is the biggest settlement in the state. A testament to the settlers’ will to create a new world for themselves, and not just have a strip of land to cultivate, is the fact that they decided to create an agrovila. Several settlements have built housing on each individual parcel of land, a choice that creates almost
insurmountable political and social problems. Not only is it almost impossible to deliver water and electricity to all the inhabitants (due to large distances between houses), but community living is almost out of the question, thus heightening the campesinos’ individualism and blocking any attempt to create a different type of society.

Any visitor that manages to arrive at an agrovila, with its simple, picturesque homes, sown plots of land, colorful flower arrangements, and domestic animals grazing and cackling in the sun, sees a bucolic setting, where everything runs smoothly. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Filhos de Sepé settlement faces its share of problems, mostly derived from the global crisis of the small farmer competing with the powerful expansion of agribusiness pushed by large multinational corporations.

One of the initial problems precipitates from the very choice to create an agrovila. Frequently, individual parcels end up far away from the housing areas, sometimes as much as 10-13 kilometers (6-8 miles). “This causes some families to quit farming altogether and instead lease their land to other settlements,” says Huli, who doesn’t shy away from questions. In order to address this problem facing the agrovila, over the last few years MST has implemented a new design for the settlements. Units consisting of 15 to 20 families are grouped together and the land is lined up in triangles with the vertex of each coming together in a central area. This way the homes are all near each other and the parcels of land are relatively close to the residential area. This of course reduces the density of the settlements from an average of 100 families to what has been termed a “housing nucleus,” which does not exceed a total of 20 families.

But perhaps the gravest problem is their dependence on multinationals that impose a style of farming based on the heavy use of agricultural toxins. “Monsanto brings us technology packages, herbicides and pesticides, in other words poison, and then they supply the rice. Over the course of time, we went from depending on the landholding elite to depending on the multinationals that own the technology. We can only conclude that in spite of our efforts, we have not moved forward, that we struggled for years to be in a new state of dependence, and all the while we are poisoning our own families and the people who consume the rice we produce,” say Huli.

Brazilian Landless Workers visit Venezuelan cooperative to learn about land reform

A Struggle Without End

In order to escape these constraints, the settlers have opted for agroecology. In the settlement, 1,600 hectares (6 square miles) are farmed “conventionally” (that is to say, with pesticides), but after an intense internal debate, the community decided to have a small nucleus of families cultivate organic rice. Last year, 29 families cultivated 120 hectares (almost half a square mile) without...
They have recovered and implemented an old campesino tradition of preparing the land with ducks. “Ducks eat all the herbs, clean the land much better than an agrochemical toxin could, and in addition they leave it fertilized with their waste. We leave the ducks there over a period of months and they do all the prep work. Later, when it is time to sow the rice, we remove them and either sell them or eat them,” Huli relates with a huge smile. Farming organically gives them their own seeds and supplies, so to produce they don’t depend on markets, and in addition they are improving the health of both the producers and the consumers.

Now, however, they face the problem of certification. In Brazil there are only three businesses that can certify organic origin, and they are all linked to multinationals. “Once more we are bumping into the same enemy.” Huli continues. But what angers them the most is that the “certifier” will only visit the settlement once a year, charges them thousands of dollars, and does not inspect the cultivation process, a fact that allows any “organic” producer to use chemicals while still receiving the organic label. To address this unexpected problem, the movement is addressing the possibility of creating a “community certification” team, which would allow them to bypass dealing with the multinationals.

In addition, the settlers complain that the state and federal governments do not provide credits for agroecological production. In short, they face a whole chain of problems, and each time they overcome one, they run into a new problem that is ultimately the same: the control of large multinationals over agricultural technologies that allows them to exploit the campesinos. The development and control of new technologies by multinationals has made possible a new type of oppression. While the campesinos no longer lack the means of production, control over work schedules, and labor methods, the multinationals’ dominance is of an “immaterial” sort, seated in the control over knowledge and the market in order to maximize profit accumulation. Huli explains how the price of rice continues to fall, so that 1,600 hectares of rice is not even enough for the settled campesinos to survive off the land.

Before leaving the settlement, we ask him what sources of income the Filhos de Sepé campesinos have. There are three: family vegetable gardens, rice, and work in neighboring municipalities, where the women are employed as cleaners and the men as construction workers. “What percentage of your income comes from these types of work?” we ask. Huli cannot avoid a look of sadness: “Unfortunately, the bulk of it comes from cleaning and construction. That’s the way it is.”

The struggle for land turns out to be much more complicated than anyone could have imagined. Perhaps the biggest triumph of the landless is that the campesinos have remained on their settlement rather than adding themselves to the burgeoning belt of poverty seen in Brazil’s big cities. The rest is a struggle that is permanent, interminable. It is more complicated than the struggle for land, since capital has shown its capacity to transform itself to control the mechanisms of domination, in this case less palpable, almost invisible. This will take persistent training and learning, which have become indispensable tools in the struggle.

For more information:


Raúl Zibechi, a member of the editorial board of the weekly Brecha de Montevideo, is a professor and researcher on social movements at the Multiversidad Franciscana de America Latina.
The Potato Culture of Aroostook County, Maine USA

a presentation at Slow Food - Terra Madre, Turin, Italy October 28, 2006
by Jim Gerritsen

Good morning. I'm Jim Gerritsen. We have a family farm and raise organic Certified Seed potatoes in the State of Maine in the United States.

I'd like to thank the folks at Slow Food and our hosts here in Italy for the opportunity they have created in bringing together this wonderful group of farmers and producers.

Our Wood Prairie Farm is located in Aroostook County, the northernmost county in Maine. Maine's biggest farm crops are potatoes followed by milk, eggs, and blueberries. At 5% Maine has the second highest ratio of organic farms to conventional farms in the United States.

The land that is now Aroostook County was uninhabited forest for thousands of years. Aroostook County's history has been heavily influenced by two factors: potatoes and its isolation from populated southern New England by forested wilderness.

In the early 1800s the first white settlers to Aroostook County started carving fields out of the forest and immediately began planting potatoes. What they found was that unlike the marginal soils covering most of New England, the geologically distinct well-drained fertile loam soils of Aroostook along with the cool northern climate were perfect for growing potatoes. Over the next one hundred years farmers made steady and massive efforts to clear the trees from hundreds of thousands of acres in order to grow potatoes.

The big revolution occurred when the railroad arrived in Aroostook County in the late 1800s. With good soil, climate, transportation, 40 inches of annual precipitation, and relative proximity to East Coast population centers, Maine's Potato Empire was created in Aroostook County. Through the early 1950s the annual crop of almost a quarter million acres made Maine the leader in United States potato production.

In the last fifty years Maine's Potato Empire has seriously waned. Among the factors:

* Shifting consumer preferences away from fresh potatoes and toward precooked meals to factory processed foods such as frozen French fries and potato chips.
* Successful standardizing marketing campaigns that convinced recent generations of American consumers that an "Idaho Russet" is the only potato worth eating.
* Competition from producers in the American West who benefit from federally-subsidized irrigation and hydroelectric projects
* The transformation of the traditional potato to a generic commodity with a capital intensive / highly mechanized / increasingly concentrated system of large scale factory-like production.
* And, finally, decade after decade of low farm gate prices.

While Aroostook County still produces more potatoes than any other county in the United States, our production is now just a quarter of its peak.

Despite this steady decline, Aroostook County still has a potato-based culture much as it has had for the last 150 years. Going back many generations everyone in Aroostook has worked in the fields picking potatoes. Many farmer's parents and non-farmers schedule vacation time so they can help family members harvest their potato crop. We are one of the last areas in the United States where schools are still closed for Harvest Break so that kids can help farmers get their crop in. Often the teenagers that we hire are taught potato picking technique by their parents and grandparents who themselves learned when they were young pickers.

In our potato culture there is an adversarial belief that hard work and thrift are best learned at an early age by working in a potato field. This is an endangered tradition as increased potato mechanization reduces opportunities for both hand work and younger workers.

Now, a little about Wood Prairie Farm. We have been farming organically for 30 years. We own 110 acres. Like most Maine farms, half of our acreage is in forest. We farm 55 acres, including 48 acres in rotated crop production. We have a 4-year rotation: Year 1: Potatoes; Year 2: Spring Wheat or Oats underplanted with Clover and Timothy grass. The clover sod from Year 3 is plowed down in Year 4 and the field is then planted first to plowdown Buckwheat, then to plowdown Rapeseed as a biofumigant. Year 5 is back to potatoes. Our rotation allows us ten to twelve acres of potatoes a year. We also grow lesser amounts of other root crops like carrots, beets, parsnips and onions. We plant in May, harvest by early October and ship from underground storage until June.

We sell seed potatoes certified as seed by the State of Maine to home and market gardeners across the US through a mailorder catalog and website. We also wholesale to mailorder seedhouses who sell our organic seed potatoes in their catalogs.

In my remaining minutes I'd like to talk about the question of scale in agriculture. Within the Maine organic community our ten acres of potato production would be considered average. However it is very small compared to the 200, 700, even 2500 acre potato crops of our non-organic neighbors. Yet the size of the thousands of farms back in Aroostook's golden age were also small by comparison to today. Clearly, as average farm size increases there is an even greater decrease in the number of farmers remaining. Fifty years ago our four mile long stretch of road had thirty potato farms. Twenty years later our entire town was down to thirty potato farms. Today there are just six potato farmers left in town. One economist has projected that if current trends continue Maine's 60,000 acres of potatoes will one day be grown by just twenty farmers each growing 3000 acres.

This upward trend in scale is similar across American agriculture. Two factors contributing to this trend are the short-sighted acceptance of genetically modified (GMO) crops by American farmers and the unrelenting rise of American corporate consolidation and domination, first within the US economy and now within the national government.

Historically, it is worth noting that subsequent to the Populist Movement of the late 1800s, the American farm economist Carl Wilkin in the 1930s concluded through his work developing the economic model known as Farm Parity that restrictions upon the size of large farms was necessary in order to ensure proper functioning of the economy, economic justice for farmers and broad benefits to the whole of society. Thirty years ago American writer and farmer Wendell Berry published his landmark work The Unsettling of America which expressed serious reservations about this then unquestioned trend within American agriculture of hyper growth, mechanization and consolidation.

The harvest we are now reaping from this modern scale is liquidated family farmers, crushed rural communities, an unstable food supply and an at-risk democracy.

Since its inception, the organic community has been a safe harbor for the American family farmer. However, corporate entry into organic production and marketing is now occurring at a rapid rate and its influence is being felt nationwide. Go into an American chain grocery store today and you will likely find corporate organic vegetables which have been shipped in from thousands of miles away with no local products to be seen. This development is harmful to family scale organic producers due to loss of market opportunity and downward price pressures.

Will organic family farmers succumb to the same forces of scale, consolidation and control that have led to the demise of other family operations? Three reasons for hope come to mind:

* First is the spirit embodied in the Slow Food dialogue of honoring the producer and valuing food that is good, clean and fair.
* Second is the developing concept of an "Organic Family Farmer" certification system that identifies...
organic family farmers in the marketplace aiding co-producers seeking authentic goods and protecting real family farmers from corporate imitators.

*And third is the dawning on Americans that local is in fact better as reflected in the growth of CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) and Farmers Markets.

Terra Madre attracted food fanciers from all over the world.

Finally, on behalf of the organic family farm community in the United States I would like to thank the world’s organic and farm communities for their courage, leadership and persistence in fighting the spread of GMOs. Your work provides monumental inspiration and assistance to those of us on the inside of the problem who are also working to stop biotech tyranny and their crimes against nature. Thank you.

Jim Gerritsen farms at Wood Prairie Farm, Bridgewater, Maine USA, jim@woodprairie.com

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** From Northeast organic farmers to Northeast organic farmers **
The 2006 Election: Trade Helped Push Democrats Over the Top

by Public Citizen
November 9, 2006

From Florida to Hawaii and parts in between, pro-fair trade challengers Tuesday beat anti-fair trade incumbents, according to a report on the 2006 midterm results conducted by Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch division. Incumbents who had voted for the U.S. trade status quo of NAFTA, WTO and Fast Track were replaced by those rejecting these failed policies and advocating improvement with seven Senate and at least 27 House seats being won by proponents of fair trade, and perhaps as high as 44 total congressional seats once all election results are in.

“This election changed the composition of Congress on trade to more closely represent U.S. public opinion. Congress needs a system for negotiating U.S. trade agreements --- with a steering wheel and emergency brakes on negotiators --- that delivers on the public’s expectations for a new trade policy that wins for American workers and farmers and does not harm the environment or food safety,” said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch division.

Trade and off-shoring were wedge issues actively used in 115 congressional campaigns nationwide and in more than 25 paid campaign ads. Election exit polls conducted by CNN and The New York Times revealed that Americans’ anxiety about the economy and job security trumped Iraq war concerns.

“This election evaporated whatever doubts remained that trade was a politically powerful issue,” Wallach said. “Given the national sweep of fair trade winners and the key races in which trade played a big role, trade and globalization issues will have major saliency in the 2008 presidential election and beyond.”

No incumbent fair trader was beaten by a “free trader.” The only Democratic incumbents seeking higher office who were defeated were anti-fair trade Reps. Harold Ford, Jr., running for Tennessee’s open Senate seat, and Rep. Jim Davis, running for Florida’s open governor slot. Despite the Democratic sweep, Republican Rep. Rob Simmons of Connecticut, who opposed Fast Track, CAFTA and the Oman FTA, is in a too-close-to-call race despite being listed for months as a likely loser.

Many GOP anti-fair trade leaders were defeated in surprise upsets: Clay Shaw (Rep.-Florida) the Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee chair, and Ways and Means members Nancy Johnson (Rep.-Connecticut), Chris Chocola (Rep.-Indiana), Melissa Hart (Rep.-Pennsylvania) and J.D. Hayworth (Rep.-Arizona). Each was replaced by a fair trader: Florida’s Ron Klein; Connecticut’s Chris Murphy; Indiana’s Joe Donnelly; Pennsylvania’s Jason Altman; and Arizona’s Harry Mitchell.

“The election results show that campaigning for a new trade policy that benefits American workers and farmers is a winner,” said Todd Tucker, research director for Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. “Failure to dissociate from the NAFTA-WTO status quo and its trade deficits and job losses was a liability, including in traditionally free trade states.”

Public Citizen’s analysis shows that trade was a top issue used to win House seats in “free trade” states such as Iowa where Democrat Bruce Braley won anti-fair trader Jim Nussle’s open seat. Trade was a top issue, with Braley ads calling for trade policy change and GOP ads calling for more of the status quo. In Kansas, Democrat fair trader Nancy Boyda defeated anti-fair trade incumbent Jim Ryan in a race where Boyda called for failed free trade deals to be replaced by fair trade agreements. In Missouri (Senate-elect Claire McCaskill beat anti-fair trade incumbent Jim Talent in a race featuring her promises to “block the outsourcing of Missouri jobs” and to “fight for fair trade policies.”)

No member of Congress with a consistent fair-trade voting record was defeated except Rep. John Hostetler (Rep.-Indiana), who until too late repeated his past tactic of not running a modern campaign by disavowing fundraising, polling, paid political professionals or ads. Rep. Charles Taylor (Rep.-North Carolina) also had a fair trade voting record and had pledged to oppose CAFTA. At the last moment, however, he failed to cast his vote against the agreement, allowing the pact’s one-vote passage. Taylor’s non-vote may be the main reason for his loss to fair trader Democrat Heath Shuler, who made it a major campaign issue.

“The Democratic sweep is not the cause of the fair-trade pick up, although partisanism is relevant because trade is now a differentiating issue between the GOP and Democrats. Democrats, call for trade reform connected to the public’s economic anxiety,” said Wallach. “Democrats have coalesced in favor of trade policy reform over the past decade as President Bill Clinton’s NAFTA, WTO and China trade deals not only failed to deliver the promised benefits but caused real damage. The GOP stayed the course on a failed trade policy and conducted high-profile fights to expand a status quo most Americans reject.”

Indeed, despite the Democratic sweep, Democrats who consistently support the NAFTA status quo, such as Sen. Maria Cantwell (Dem.-Washington) and Reps. Melissa Bean (Dem.-Illinois), Ed Towns (Dem.-New York) and Henry Cuellar (Dem.-Texas), faced difficult re-election campaigns after alienating their bases and enduring trade-related challenges in Democratic primaries and from Independents.

“Perhaps most interesting about the trade electoral trend beyond its national scope is that it busted the myth of the trade debate being divided into ‘pro-traders and protectionists’. The candidates who ran and won on trade explicitly advocated better trade policies. They were not against trade, but against the specific avoidable damage delivered by more than a decade of the NAFTA-WTO model,” Wallach said.
For Teen workshops, please contact: Sakiko Iosimichi at: 11 Ackley Place, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130; (617) 458-9614, chacao22@hotmail.com.

If you would like to place an ad in the program book, exhibit at the conference, or Sponsor the conference next year, contact Katie Campbell-Nelson at katiecampbellnelson@gmail.com (address: PO Box 40, Charlestown, MA 01339 and phone: 423-337-4327).

If any of you out there have some good connections with your local newspapers, radio stations, magazines, TV/cable stations, health food stores, etc., I would love to receive that information to try to bring more people to the conference through various means. Please feel free to contact me with any of that information (specifics are great – names/phone numbers/addresses/emails). Send it to: Susan P. Lewis, 17 West Main St., Wilmington, VT 05363; (802) 464-4660, wakupig@yahoo.com.

Attention Certified Organic Northeastern Farmers:

As in past years NOFA will feature a meal made entirely from organic ingredients produced in the Northeast. If you are interested in showcasing your farm’s produce or other products by supplying ingredients for this meal, please contact John Ferris at (413) 624-5172 or j_david_ferris@hotmail.com.

We are up in the air about a Pre-conference but may be doing a Buy Local Pre-Conference in conjunction with CISA of Western MA. The Pre-Conference, if it runs, will be held on Friday only. More details will be forthcoming.

The NOFA Summer Conference will be supporting these thoughts and we hope to offer you a wonderful weekend, full of possibilities, hopes and dreams. At the very least the conference will bring a smile to your face, some good food and information, and new contacts to pursue. Come join us. And bring a friend, or two.

NOSB Meeting (continued from page 1)

Director Katherine DiMatteo was there too, as a consultant for Stonyfield yogurt and later for a kelp manufacturing company. In contrast to the overflowing Pasture Symposium/NOSB meeting at State College, PA in April, there was only a smattering of farmers this time, thanks to the limited agenda. While there was just one grassroots consumer who testified, consumer/environmental advocates were very much in evidence, including the Washington-based Center for Food Safety, the Humane Society and Food and Water Watch. The bulk of the attendees were a diverse group of organic advocates, grassroots organizations (including reps from the NOFA Interstate Council, NOFA-VT and NOFA-NJ), certifiers, former highly experienced NOSB members, reps from the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) and sundry animal welfare groups – many who came to town a day early to meet under the auspices of the Organic Committee of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, of which NOFA is a member.

The NOSB was created by the OPFA as the citizens’ advisory group to the NOP, in charge of developing standards and reviewing materials for inclusion on the National List of Acceptable Substances that is used to qualify foods and materials for the official “USDA Organic” label. In a behind-the-scenes process, nominated NOSB members are appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture for staggered 5-year terms in categories that include 4 farmers, 3 environmentalists, 3 consumer/public interest advocates, 2 handlers/processors, one scientist, one retailer and one certification agent. The bulk of the NOSB’s work is done between meetings at the committee level, with each member serving on several committees including Livestock, Materials, Handling, Crops, Policy Development and Compliance, Accreditation and Certification. The board is currently lacking one consumer/public interest advocate after the appointee, a corporate official from General Mills, resigned under protest by organic stakeholders who said the appointment egregiously misrepresented the organic community. The position is expected to be filled in January, along with the regular appointments of new members to the board.

The 1990 Organic Foods Production Act, the legal basis for the entire NOP, specifically created the NOSB as an active partner in creating and maintaining organic standards. It is somewhat of an anomaly in the bastions of USDA, however, in that the citizen group has been given some real power in determining and maintaining industry standards. The NOP’s job is to formulate formal recommendations to the NOSB, based on extensive public hearings and hours and hours of committee meetings and conference calls, much of it dealing with the unwieldy but effective body of rules and regulations defining organic practices. Serving on the NOSB requires a major (unpaid) time commitment with a workload. The NOSB chair, Kevin O’Reill reported there had been a total of 62 committee conference calls since the April meeting, with decisions documented at www.ams.usda.gov/nosb, the NOSB website.

USDAs leave no doubt of who is in charge, however. Right at the top of the NOSB website portal, emblazoned in blue, is the statement: “Recommendations made by the NOSB are not official policy until they are approved and adopted by the USD.A.” Roger Blobaum, a Midwest organic representative and longtime advocate said that to date there have been over 50 official NOSB recommendations that have not been dealt with, or remain completely ignored by the NOP.

One of the previous NOSB recommendations concerning annual peer review of the NOP’s accreditation program was an agenda item at this meeting. Organic policy analyst, Lynn Coody, traveled from Eugene, Oregon to comment on the lack of progress toward implementing a Rule that would finally place the NOP in compliance with internationally accepted ISO guidelines, whose standards govern the transparency of accreditation agencies around the world. In 2004, the NOP was subjected to a scathing outside audit by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and a USDA Inspector General’s report, which found, among other things, that its accreditation system was way out of line with internationally accepted guidelines. Lynn, together with Elizabeth Henderson, also headed an accreditation sub-committee for the Organic Trade Association to help integrate ISO compliance into the NOP rule, until OTA abruptly terminated the committee when they restructured in 2005. Because aspects of the ANSI audit were not made public by the NOP, the Center for Food Safety filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) petition to get the information.

These ongoing questions of program transparency were part of the context behind the rather strained opening remarks by the NOP’s Barbara Robinson at the NOSB meeting. She said that while the pasture rule is a top priority for the NOP, her excuse for it not being finished is that much of their limited staff time is being diverted to handle several FOIA petitions, stakeholder complaints and lawsuits. Outsiders can come in and disrupt business and this time, thanks to the limited agenda, there was only a smattering of farmers this time, thanks to the limited agenda.

Robinenson referred specifically to a recent lawsuit by Arthur Harvey, now in District Court, but said she can’t discuss the case while it is being adjudicated. Harvey’s new suit challenges the NOP’s 2002 self-set policy allowing the use of FDA-certified conventional chemical processing aids and food contact substances to be used in certified organic processed food. Harvey’s lawyer contends the present use of hundreds of such synthetic substances in organic products are illegal, because they have not been properly vetted and approved by the NOSB for inclusion on the National List. OTA, with their lawyer Jay Friedman, has joined with the NOP legal team in fighting the lawsuit, saying that the expanding FDA approved list of food contact substances is already accepted for use in conventional foods and there is no reason to override the FDA approach as it applies to organic food processing. Curiously, the wording of the OTA rider that was secretly inserted as an amendment into an Appropriations bill a year ago (in response to the first Harvey lawsuit) did not adequately remedy this issue and the food industry interests are back in town to bring a smile to your face, some good food and information, and new contacts to pursue. Come join us. And bring a friend, or two.

In his opening remarks, NOP chief Mark Bradley gave a more balanced appraisal. He said the program now oversees over 20,000 certified organic operations and that, as part of the NOP’s ongoing
international inspection program, he’ll be traveling to China in December to investigate complaints and to assess NOP-certified operations. Mark is relatively new to the program and importantly, has experience in ISO accreditation compliance. He also said the program is appreciative of the increased funding for the NOP in the President’s budget, which represents a much needed step in the right direction.

At that point Barbara Robinson also chimed in, saying the grassroots stakeholders attempted (backed by NOFA via its membership in the National Campaign and the National Organic Committee) to divert $150,000 of that money to support the cost share program that reimburses farmers for some certification costs, cuts into the needs of the NOP (this is also the position of OTA). She claimed the program is appreciative of the increased funding for the NOP in the President’s budget, which represents a much needed step in the right direction.

Before I could answer, Larry seized the moment. He leaned back. “No, I didn’t know that. Why don’t they tell you that?”

I wasn’t prepared when Larry, who turned out to be a member of the Mystical Order of Lawn Worshippers, chomped onto my introduction faster than a grub on grass roots in late spring. “What do you know about lawns?” he asked with such energy I almost jumped back. Had this subject been on his mind all night?

I said, “Well, I’ve given up most of my lawn. I’ve got a meadow and wildflowers.”

Sheila tried to stay calm, but had to ask, “What do your neighbors say?”

Before I could answer, Larry seized the moment. “I tried those organic fertilizers last year and I got lousy results,” he said. His eyes grew large. He leaned forward with his wine glass.

My hostess-with-the-mostest had turned me over to the enemy with no warning. I was being asked to make a political stand on organic lawn care before I’d gotten my first drink. I ventured tentatively, “You know that it takes about three years to transition your lawn off conventional methods?”

He leaned back. “No, I didn’t know that. Why don’t they tell you that?”

I wasn’t sure I could defend the $8.25 per hour retail help at his garden center on this matter. “I guess they don’t know,” I said. Whoever ‘they’ are, added the voice inside my head.

“It doesn’t matter, anyway,” he continued. “I quit the voice inside my head. I wasn’t sure I could defend the $8.25 per hour retail help at his garden center on this matter. “I guess they don’t know,” I said. Whoever ‘they’ are, added the voice inside my head.

“But I told you what I knew about lawns.” She added, “It’s not that easy.”

I said, “Well, I’ve given up most of my lawn. I’ve got a meadow and wildflowers.”

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“My impression by the end of the meeting was that the framers of the original 1990 Organic Foods Production Act and past NOSB members have done a great job in formulating rules and regs to protect organic standards and cover eventualities they couldn’t possibly foresee all these years in the future. While many of the rules seem cumbersome, petitioners for changes and industry groups have to jump through numerous hoops and intrusive public vetting to achieve a consensus opinion based on the law. While USDA still holds the greater power and there still are major transparency issues in their administration, they have found they cannot act unilaterally or with impunity. Maintaining organic integrity depends on the informed vigilance of organic advocates and grassroots groups. That’s why NOFA went to Washington.

Who says organic gardeners don’t have conversational skills?

There is something about the “O” word that brings out emotions. Maybe the public needs a competition called X-Gardens or a reality show called Seedling Survivor. Or maybe I need a seminar on conversational skills for the organic gardener.

In the meantime, I have started fantasizing about being introduced at parties as an actuarial.
Slow Food Revolution

by Carlo Petrini in conversation with Gigi Winter, 2006-07

This unease was only reinforced as subsequent bouts of mad cow disease, dioxin poisoning, and hormone-laden meat battered their consciousness. That same year the largest McDonalds in the world opened in Rome. That spurred Carlo and his friends in 1987 to publish a manifesto against Fast Food, proclaiming that:

"Starting from today, fast food is to be avoided and replaced by slow food, that is to say, by centers of enjoyed pleasure. In other terms, the table should be given back to taste, and to the pleasure of the gourmand."

They quickly adopted the snail as their symbol, affirming both its unhurried gait and its reknown as a gastronomic delicacy. Soon the movement, aided always by Pettrini’s humor, his audacity, and his sense of theater, was besieged with attention. They publicized small but excellent restaurants throughout Europe, highlighted prized wines and cheeses from very specific regions, printed guides to local wineries, organized international conferences to extend the movement and local councils of farmers to protect their regional brands. TV crews swarmed over the extravagant feasts he organized with the best chefs of Europe, famous actors started showing up and promoting obscure restaurants, writers and intellectuals endorsed the movement enthusiastically.

To read this book is to immerse yourself in the details of Carlo’s life: his early transition from passionate Catholic to equally passionate Marxist, his activism, his friends, his intense feelings. He regales us with stories of how he used his knack for public relations to build recognition of Slow Food. But he is always very specific — who was at the meeting, where it was held, what wine they were drinking. It is as if he treasures the specific and the unrepeatable.

To read this book is also to be plunged into the recent history of the Italian left: the Italian Communist Party, the radical publication R Manifesto, the Associazione ricreativa culturale italiana (Arci) created by the left parties. This is the ocean in which Pettrini swims and the connections he uses to promote his movement. To those of us in America who heard only dimly, if at all, of these matters, the going sometimes gets a little difficult to follow.

But as much as this book focuses on characters and connections of whom we may know little, it speaks to a situation we immediately recognize. Pettrini puts his basic critique simply:

"Until World War II, the Italian family spent 60 percent of its budget to buy food, the diet was low in calories, and there was a strong bond with the world of farming. Today, buying groceries consumes only 17 percent of family income. With the end of rural civilization and the rise of the industrial age, the umbilical cord between country and city has been severed. New consumer habits have been established. In the mid-eighties, when Argicola was taking its first steps, only the rich were looking for quality products, but farmers and producers could not make enough profit from selling them. At the same time, most Italians were consuming low-priced food, the product of intensive agriculture and livestock farming by rich landowners, whose great economic strength enabled them to influence the market. It was a paradox: food for the rich produced by poor farmers, and mass food products produced by rich farmers. In
the view of the Slow Food leadership, it was a trend that had to be turned around. Growing an endangered species of bean, raising a particular kind of free-range chicken, producing cheeses made from raw rather than industrially pasteurized milk had to become profitable. It wasn’t a question of providing charity to poor exploited farmers, but rather assisting them to obtain proper recognition for their work from discriminating consumers who were willing to spend a bit more in exchange for wholesome, better-tasting food. And it wasn’t just an Italian problem; it was a global one.”

That is a reality easily recognized today by organic farmers in this country. Despite the good work of Slow Food, much more remains to be done. If you are interested in helping spread the movement, you might enjoy this book on its lively history.

**Mad Sheep: The True Story Behind the USDA’s War on a Family Farm**

by Linda Faillace

published in 2006 by Chelsea Green, PO Box 428, White River Junction, VT www.chelseagreen.com, 802-295-6300 $25.00, 324 pp, hard cover reviewed by Grace Gershuny

This book relates the dismaying story of the Faillace family’s unsuccessful battle with USDA to stop the destruction of a flock of unique and beloved imported sheep. The sheep were carefully researched and selected to introduce high milk producing genetics into the options for sustainable small farm enterprises. The rationale for quarantining and later destroying the flock was the need to protect the public (more importantly, the beef industry) from fears of “mad cow disease,” which the government decided might be carried by these sheep. The dust jacket of the book, published by Chelsea Green, describes it as “the unforgettable story of one family’s struggle against a bullying and corrupt government agency that long ago abandoned the family farmer to serve the needs of corporate agriculture and the industrialization of our food supply.”

The book delivers as promised. Many of us in the Vermont alternative agriculture community have followed this story, and rural Vermont is credited with helping rally support for the Faillace family. It is an outrageous story, told in the first person by a primary protagonist. Reading it filled me with admiration for the author on several levels. First, she writes well, and was obviously taking very good notes the whole time she was caught up in the events she describes. She has done an excellent job of relating the story on the personal level without making it about her, or even her family or the sheep they struggled to keep. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this book, however, is the author’s refusal to demonize the bad actors at USDA, to stoop to their level of misrepresentation, or even to exaggerate. The support and good efforts of some officials was acknowledged, although these were few and far between. In all this painful recounting of an incredible nightmare there is no name-calling, no attack on all USDA (or federal government) activities as evil or villainous (except perhaps by the author of the forward, who describes it as a “tale of good and evil”). No call is made for retribution, though justice might include placing public responsibility on those who knowingly falsified information for political ends. The call to action issued in the final pages of the book is not for an attack on the “enemy,” but for all of us to channel our outrage towards creation of a better food system. Any activist seeking to promote justice, the better world would do well to emulate this attitude.

**Hands-On Agronomy: Understanding Soil Fertility & Fertilizer Use**

by Neal Kinsey & Charles Walters

Published by Acres U.S.A., 2006 391 pages with index, softcover, $30.00 review by Jen Mix

Another possible title for Hands-On Agronomy might be Stories of Soils, for Neal Kinsey shares his knowledge of soil chemistry with us by way of dozens of stories about the soils and growers he has worked with during his forty-plus years as a consulting agronomist. Kinsey brings us into the field with him in order to explain soil chemistry and plant nutrition in a “hands-on” way.

Mr. Kinsey became a certified agronomist in 1973 under the direction of his mentor, William A. Albrecht of the University of Missouri. Since then, he has worked with farmers in all fifty states and in sixty countries, and has tackled almost every conceivable crop and soil challenge imaginable.

At the outset, Kinsey states that most farmers do not trust soil tests, and declares the purpose of his book: to endeavor to answer the question, “if a soil test is to be trusted, which one, and why?” He then tells a few stories about farmers who have received inaccurate test results and/or inaccurate fertilizer recommendations.

In one case, a farmer who was skeptical of his county extension agency sent in two soil samples from the same field to the extension soil testing lab. He indicated on the paperwork that the two samples were from different fields in different parts of the county, one from the north, and one from the south. The lab made liming recommendations based not on the results of the test, but rather on the geographical location from which it believed the soils came from.

After Mr. Kinsey plants that seed of mistrust in us, he begins to tell us the stories of how his soil tests and recommendations have helped countless growers. Virtually all of these stories come from large-scale farms, but still the lessons contained in them are applicable to the smaller-scale grower.

These stories can start to get a bit overwhelming for the reader with only a basic understanding of soil chemistry. The discussions include exchange capacity, percent saturation, how different plant nutrients react differently with one another in different soil conditions and different weather conditions, but only if…. and never when…. unless…. excepting cases where…might make the reader wonder if the discussion at hand is some sort of a labyrinthine puzzle designed to perplex and confuse.

But even the most novice student will easily extract the more germane points. Small imbalances in the soil can have dramatic effects on crops; too much of one nutrient can be just as bad for your soil as too little of it; “A soil with a deficiency is also a soil with too much of something else;” “When it comes to fertilizers, it’s a good rule to follow that in the long run, too little is always better than too much.”

If you are a farmer less inclined toward the science-y aspects of crop production, who relies minimally on soil tests and more on faith and compost, there is encouragement and validation for you in here. Kinsey explains in accessible terms why humus is so important in soils. The ability of well-structured soils to “obscure our mistakes” derives from its abundance of surface area on which to hold and then make available large quantities of essential plant nutrients. Humus, in fact, has three times the nutrient holding ability of clay soils.

Because Kinsey works with both organic and conventional farmers, there is a good deal of explanation of non-organic nutrient sources. This information still proves useful to the organic grower in that it helps to better understand the differences and challenges that organic growers face in feeding the soil versus the plant. Kinsey does state that all his recommendations are based on improving the soil rather than feeding the plant for a short-term fix.

Is this book a long advertisement for using Kinsey’s own soil testing service? It might seem so, as it begins with anecdotes about faulty soil tests and recommendations, goes on to show how infinitely complex soil chemistry is (there are even more exceptions to rules than there are rules!), and ends with specific instructions on how to take a soil sample for submission to his lab.
Lessons in Nature
by Malcolm Beck
www.acresusa.org
Softcover, 332 pp., $20.00 U.S.
reviewed by Erica Myers-Russo

The title pretty much says it all: Lessons in Nature: 50 Years of Organic Advice from the Southwest’s Foremost Composter, Gardener, Farmer. The only potentially misleading bit is that Beck’s solid, no-nonsense advice is applicable no matter where you live.

Although Beck makes it clear upfront that he had no formal education beyond high school, he’s a man of formidable knowledge and reason. Each chapter distills some aspect of organic growing Beck has gained from his decades of observation, trial, and research. There is no hearsay in this book, no waxing poetic, no oratory.

The book is divided into broad categories: Why Organic Gardening, Soil Building, Planting and Growing, Critters: Friend & Foe, and an Appendix. Each section contains short chapters—generally not more than 4 pages—relaying some bit of concrete advice or information. Beck’s writing is uncluttered, homely, hardboiled.

The topics are surprisingly detailed and far-ranging: several deal with understanding phosphate’s role in the soil. Several more detail biosolids. Another looks at the role of mulch and compost—analyzing types, and returns to the book later. There is a lot of information in here, and it could easily muddy your mind rather than make soil science more understandable.

Beck manages to treat extensive and complex topics in chunks manageable and returns to the book later. There is a lot of information in here, and it could easily muddy your mind rather than make soil science more understandable.

In The Earth Knows My Name, Patricia Klindienst takes a classic analogy and turns it on its head to give us a new way of perceiving ourselves. Immigrants, she reasons, are often compared to plants: uprooted from a given locale and then transplanted (with varying degrees of success) to a new environment. But what if we were to view the immigrants as gardeners, instead? People who learned their relationship to the land in a given place, and then had to move to a very different place and reinterpret that relationship? What would we learn about them? The land? Our own country?

She begins from her own vantage point: a grandchild of Italian immigrants. The discovery of an old family photo recording Sacco and Vanzetti’s looming execution sets Klindienst on a trail—to learn more about the execution, about what it meant to her family, about her family itself.

Vanzetti, she learns, spent his days in prison daydreaming about his family’s garden in Italy. Might other immigrants identify with their gardens as passionately?

Using her own lineage as common ground, Klindienst interviews immigrants who allow her a startlingly intimate entrée into their own stories. She takes us from Native American and Hispanic farms in New Mexico to African American Gullah farms in South Carolina, from a Massachusetts farm run by Cambodian refugees to a home garden created by a Punjabi woman who chose to leave her country rather than remain under Indira Gandhi. She gives each chapter a theme: Freedom, Memory, Community, Justice.

In each chapter we learn the particulars of the immigrants’ story even as Klindienst teases out the experiences shared by immigrants regardless of ethnicity. Writing deftly, often eloquently, she captures a shared relationship to the earth frequently in glaring contrast to that of the immigrants’ adopted American culture.

If there is anything missing from Klindienst’s work, it is the link from farm to food—recipes would make the connections she draws that much more concrete. However, I suspect it would require a separate book to be able to do justice to the topic.

When I picked up The Earth Knows My Name, I expected to be interested, perhaps even educated. I did not expect to be moved. It was a wonderful surprise to realize that I was reading not just an intriguing book, but an important one.
Reaping the Harvest

by Donna Lee Walsh

In loving memory of my
Great Grandfather Harry Lee Cole

As the end of summer drew close, we were reminded that it was potato picking time. Perched at the window, we all waited anxiously for Grampa’s blue truck to peer from the driveways chump of trees. Before the screen door could even slam, we had already nestled our bottoms on blankets in the bed of his truck. Our hands gripped the side rails in anticipation.

Proudly Grampa glanced back at us with a nod and a smile that held his cigar. “Ready?” his eyes invited our reply. We nodded, bubbling with pride. Today we are grampa’s helpers. With glee we all sat in the open bed of the old Ford as the wind danced our hair and glued grins on our faces. We passed the time with giggles and waves to neighbors. We had already seen a summer of puddle splashing, sinking our “Keds” run so fast sneakers deep into labor. Eagerly we hopped down from the truck to beckon us with its pride from a summer’s hard work. The plot of land seemed relived our sweaty brows. The potato field was our life was spared. Grampa smiled in the rearview mirror, we knew he was thankful our life was spared. Grampa always had good potato finder. All five of us laughed as a bump in the road lifted us up of our seats, wondering who flew through the screen door.

Sure was sweet! Our nurtured bellies were content. We ate juicy apples from the Ingals Farm. Grampa’s thermos never let us down, as a tradition it made them before dawn. They were cut into triangles and I am sure she had Gram’s famous butter and sugar sandwich. We passed a neatly creased wax paper package and, as hoped, Gram’s famous lemonade with the ice cubes that clanged the glass and a lemon wedge to pucker. We were embraced by the wonderful smell of freshly made ginger snaps and grams apron-covered apron-covered hug. Ginger, the family cat, danced his tail around our feet as we attempted to free the days labor from the clouds of dirt road dust.

When the old Ford reached the barn and level ground, we gained balance and relief. Grampa would glance back in the rearview mirror to catch our expressions as he played with the gas and brake pedals. We all screamed with excitement of toppling out with hundreds of rolling potatoes forever lost in the clouds of dirt road dust.

The long rows of rich soil proudly displayed our filled bushels. Grampa, with cigar clenched in teeth would lug them to his truck. When the last one was neatly tucked into place he called for us to pile in the back. I brushed off my hands and knees then battled the disrupted mounds of our labor toward his truck. We placed ourselves somewhat securely onto the piles of potatoes, while gripping the baskets wire handles.

Riding off to the farmhouse, our mouths watered for Grammies famous lemonade with the ice cubes that clang the glass and a lemon wedge to pucker. As we reached the steep dirt driveway we all anticipated the big tilt soon to come. Grampa would glance back in the rearview mirror to catch our expressions as he played with the gas and brake pedals. We all screamed with excitement of toppling out with hundreds of rolling potatoes forever lost in the clouds of dirt road dust.

The old Ford reached the barn and level ground, we gained balance and relief. Grampa pattered with his long awaited fortune as each child raced to reach the farmhouse first. The old screen door welcomed us with its predictable squeak. Soon we were embraced by the wonderful smell of freshly made ginger snaps and grams apron-covered apron-covered hug. Ginger, the family cat, danced his tail around our feet as we attempted to free the days labor from our sneakers. With Grammies nod of approval we were invited into the arms of her kitchen. Gram stood at the sink while we all waited in line like soldiers to have our hands washed. In turn we each stood at the sink step stool, neatly tucked into place. Gram gripped the bar of soap and worked up a rich lather. While the water trickled she guided my small hands in hers, gently scrubbing every knuckle and nail.
Washing away so much more than just a day’s work. I welcomed her gentle touch that seemed to speak of trust and security.

We settled ourselves around the table beneath the lace-covered windows. Grampa boasted of his harvest and his dedicated helpers. We made shapes out of our cookies with our teeth, still remembering our manners. I nibbled a sailboat out of mine and out of our cookies with our teeth, still remembering the hard and tired, and exhausted but proud.

Every detail in this sweet tale is true and still touches my heart. Even the familiar sound. My ears perked up waiting for that predictable sweet sound of her lifting the tin cover and the familiar sound. Gram hollered, knowing full well the answer. We all wrestled to be first in line. All was now content, for flight, I waited. “Who wants a buttermint?” she hollered, knowing full well the answer. We all

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Thursday, March 1, 2007: Introduction to Alternative Herd Health Treatments, Grafton, Massachusetts, for more info: Kate Rossiter, (413) 625-0118, or Don Franczyk, (978) 297-4171, or in January, www.nofamass.org or www.baystateorganic.org

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Calendar

Saturday, December 9, 2006: NOFA-NH's Saving Seeds conference, Concord, NH, for more info: Email info@nofanh.org, call 603-224-5022, or check out www.nofanh.org

Tuesday, January 9 - Thursday, January 11, and Tuesday, January 16 & Wednesday, January 17, 2007: 6th Annual NOFA Organic Land Care Course in Leominster, Massachusetts, for more info: Kathy Litchfield, (978) 724-0108, kathylich29@yahoo.com or visit www.organiclandcare.net

Saturday, January 13, 2007: NOFA-VT’s 2nd Annual Direct Marketing Conference, for more info: info@nofavt.org or 802-434-4122 or www.nofavt.org

Thursday, February 1, 2007: Introduction to Organic Milk Production, Grafton, Massachusetts, for more info: Kate Rossiter, (413) 625-0118, or Don Franczyk, (978) 297-4171, or in January, www.nofamass.org or www.baystateorganic.org

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Friday, April 27 and Saturday, April 28, 2007: Organic Beekeeping Workshop, Chestnut Ridge, NY, for More Info: beework@pfeiffercenter.org or 845-352-5020 ext.20 or www.pfeiffercenter.org

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The Natural Farmer

Winter, 2006-07

47

The Natural Farmer
Thank you, organic farmers, for all that you do.

From all the folks at Stonyfield Farm

Canola is farmed alongside rice in Asia. This issue contains news, features, and articles about organic growing in the Northeast, plus a Special Supplement on Globalization and Agriculture.