The 34th Annual NOFA Summer Conference
August 8-10, 2008 at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
by Megan Pacelli

Change is always a little more apparent during this time of year.... you can see it in the turning leaves and the woolen scarves and hats, taste it in the pumpkin pie and feel it in the brisk air. It was also easy to feel it at the first meeting of the NOFA Summer Conference Committee, as we worked together to establish a new beginning in a beautiful new space – the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Although the venue is new, the conference will still be packed with all the things that people travel from all over the Northeast to experience at our summer event. Some come for the informative workshops and inspiring speakers. Some come to catch up with old friends and make connections with new ones. Some come to dance to local music and enjoy tasty organic meals. Whatever your reason, mark your calendars for this special event!

Although we have always enjoyed the intimate setting of Hampshire College, we are ready to spread our wings in our new site. On a tour of the campus with UMass event planners, it was easy to envision the crowded farmers market, the country fair, and the contra dance coming alive in the university’s picturesque rooms and grassy outside areas.

Those of you who have spent time at UMass may already know how much the campus has to offer. The big windows, wide-open space and wood floors in the Student Union Ballroom seem made for music, dancing and celebration. The open and inviting Cape Cod Lounge is the perfect place for the creative projects and activities that make the children’s workshops fun and educational. The Reading Room is a more intimate spot ideal for movie viewing, while the Graduate Lounge will be teen central. Three residence halls plus a large grassy camping area promise to keep attendees who are staying over comfortable and happy throughout the weekend. Keynote speaker events will be held in the Ballroom, or in an expansive area outdoors – depending on what the New England skies have in store for us that weekend!

We are doing our best to make sure that the transition to UMass is seamless for attendees. The committee is made up of new faces, as well as familiar faces, and reviewing comments from last year helped us focus on ways to create an even better summer conference experience in 2008.

Adrienne Shelton (adults), Jenn Caron (teens) and Valerie Walton (children), our workshop coordinators, are working hard to arrange workshops that are enlightening and worthwhile, and we rely on the NOFA community to help make this possible. Please be sure to read the following information, and respond by December 31st if you would like to present.

Call For Workshop Presenters
Are you interested in presenting a workshop at the 2008 NOFA Summer Conference? Each year, the NOFA Summer Conference provides a valuable opportunity for farmers, gardeners, homesteaders, educators, and environmentalists to share resources and ideas in order to grow a vibrant organic community.

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: Alternative Energy and the Environment; Animals; Crops; Farming and the Community; Farm Economics and Management; Cooking and Food Preparation; Farming and Education; Politics and Policy; Fruits, Nuts, and Trees; Garden and Greenhouse; Herbs and Flowers; International Agriculture; Land Care; Marketing; Nutrition and Healthcare; Of the Spirit; Practical Skills; Soil and Fertility; Weeds, Insects and Disease; and Farm Tours. If you enjoy working with youth, please consider offering a workshop for teens or children.

The 2008 NOFA Summer Conference will be held at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA from August 8-10. Workshop presenters receive free conference registration and a $50 honorarium, plus up to $35 reimbursable for copying or materials expenses, and $.50/mile for hauling costs for large animals.

If you would like to participate as an adult workshop presenter, please contact Adrienne Shelton at (413) 625-9432 or adrienne@redgatefarm.org by December 31, 2007. Additionally, by this deadline date, you can contact Jenn Caron to offer a teen conference workshop. Possible topics could be Healing Arts, Practical Farm Skills, Hands On Arts Projects, Music, particularly Drumming, Cooking and International Agriculture. Movements. Other ideas are also welcome. If you enjoy teaching and being inspired by our attendees, please contact Jennifer Caron at (978) 544-5575. (continued on page 41)

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Letters to the Editor

To the editor:

I am very concerned about an item that is in the present Farm Bill and that is the plan to change the WIC and Elderly Stamps from paper to a plastic credit card that is redeemable anywhere that sells fresh produce and not just at Farmers’ Markets. This would wipe us small farmers out and make sure that the poor no longer have real access to fresh, locally produced farm products. I am the Market Master for the Willimantic Farmers’ Market and I can tell you that about 1/3 of our income (we are five farms selling produce) is from the WIC and Elderly Stamp programs. On the last day of the market, my income was $93 in WIC checks and $5 in cash. The food stamps were not used at all. During the entire summer, from mid June to the end of October, only two customers (2 sisters) used the Food stamp machine. This was about $70 income divided between 6 vendors. The cost to us of running this program is: $310 paid to the phone company because they insisted that we have a business line. I personally either ran the machine or ate the cost of hiring someone to run it. I wanted to get rid of the machine but now I don’t quite know what to do.

Please alert people to the fact that plastic costs the farmers to use and enriches the corporations without helping the poor as the government cut the WIC budget in half this year.

Thanking you for your attention to the above, I remain

Sincerely yours, Sarah Pappenheimer

Dear Sarah,

Thanks for writing about this. The move to plastic for these programs is a real blow to the small farmer who doesn’t have the volume needed to justify the start-up expenses to accept the cards. I agree that anyone affected by this should contact his or her legislators to make this point.

Jack Kittredge

Labor on Organic Farms

As anyone who has run an organic farm knows, labor is one of the most crucial factors determining success or failure. Often the most expensive item in the budget, labor expenses are an area in which we seek ways to cut costs. Yet we need competent, experienced, reliable help and usually this involves paying living wages that will attract workers back year after year. Hiring workers also involves farmers in a myriad of legal responsibilities – withholding pay, FICA contributions, workers compensation, regulations on minimum wages and maximum hours, etc.

In this issue of The Natural Farmer we discuss various options farmers have chosen to get the work done, and lay out some of the issues they face because of those choices. By no means a comprehensive survey of this topic, we hope the articles included will give you an idea of some alternatives which are possible, as well as the pluses and minuses of each.

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 Julie Rawson, but most of the material is either written by members or summarized by us from information people send us.

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 2008 Manure in Organic Agriculture
- Summer 2008 On-Line Marketing of Farm Products
- Fall 2008 Winter Production and Sales

Moving or missed an issue? The Natural Farmer will not be forwarded by the post office, so you need to make sure your address is up-to-date if you move. You get your subscription to this paper in one of two ways. Direct subscribers who send us $10 are put on our database here. These folks should send address changes to us. Most of you, however, get this paper as a NOFA member benefit for paying your chapter dues. Each quarter every NOFA chapter sends us address labels for their paid members, which we use to mail out the issue. 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 see stories done, and lay out some of the issues they face. As anyone who has run an organic farm knows, labor is one of the most crucial factors determining success or failure. Often the most expensive item in the budget, labor expenses are an area in which we seek ways to cut costs. Yet we need competent, experienced, reliable help and usually this involves paying living wages that will attract workers back year after year. Hiring workers also involves farmers in a myriad of legal responsibilities – withholding pay, FICA contributions, workers compensation, regulations on minimum wages and maximum hours, etc.

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The Natural Farmer

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 subscribers or NOFA members who get the TNF) for occasional needs or offerings. Send in up to 100 words and we’ll print it free 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 don’t get the paper yourself you can still send in an ad - just send $5 along too! Send NOFA Exchange ads directly to The Natural Farmer, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or (preferably) E-mail to TNF@nofa.org.

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 Sabrina Nye, 34 Abbott St., Springfield, MA 01118 or nyes@comcast.net and enclose a check for the space charge plus $25. Ads or sponsorships with payment to our advertising contact Sabrina at (860) 816-0873 or nyes@comcast.net. 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.

Sponsorships

- 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:

- 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.

Contact for Display Ads or Sponsorships: Send display ads or sponsorships with payment to our advertising manager Sabrina Nye, 34 Abbott St., Springfield, MA 01118. If you have questions, or want to reserve space, contact Sabrina at (888) 816-0873 or nyes@comcast.net.
The Natural Farmer Facing Subscription Price Increase

It is with great reluctance that NOFA is facing a decision to raise the price of a subscription to this paper. It has not gone up in 20 years, and we are not able to absorb price increases for postage, newsprint, and printing any longer.

In the spring of 2008 we plan to substantially increase both the $10 domestic subscription price, and the $18 foreign subscription rate. Rates to chapters that include a subscription as a benefit to their members will not increase from the current $7 per member group rate.

We will honor existing subscriptions of course, and want to give readers a chance to renew at old rates if they choose. If you want us to tack an extra year onto your sub at $10 we will do so until the spring.

Sorry for this increase. Many subscribers have long said it was a bargain, and we wish we could keep it at $10. We hope it will still be a bargain.

-- Jack Kittredge & Julie Rawson
Winter, 2007 -08

The Natural Farmer

NOFA Exchange

Blow Your Own Horn!

Three Apprenticeships available on organic vegetable farm in western CT for 08 season, April -Nov. Help plant, cultivate, harvest, and market produce through a 400 share CSA and farmers’ markets. Opportunity to learn many of the agricultural and business skills you will need to run an organic farm. Compensation includes a private room in separate apprentice house, farm produce and eggs, $900 monthly stipend plus scheduled room in separate apprentice house, farm produce and exhaustion provided. To apply, send a letter of intent and resume to Paul Bucciaglia, Fort Hill Farm, 18 Fort Hill Rd., New Milford, CT 06776. Also see www.forthillfarm.com.

2008 Position Available: Assistant Farm Manager - for two and one-half acre 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 weeks 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 Bourruit, Long Island Shelter, P.O. Box 220648, Boston, MA 02122. 617-534-2526 x304. jcbourruit@bphc.org

Beautiful Farm For Rent...in the Finger Lake Area. One bedroom house for rent, available October 15th, 2007, Rent $685 month/net (tenant pays all utilities). Large barn, small barn, machinery shed rent any or all at $2.11 sq ft/year/net. Productive ag land, 70+ acres adjoin the barn, rent at $55.35 acre/year. Excellent location for Market Garden Sales, Wine area, perfect for farm stand...on New York State Rt. 414 at Schuyler County Rt. 18... Only organic proposals considered. Rent all or part. Non-smokers only. All owners: 718.834.1010 (8 am to 8 pm), if busy, please call 917.602.1010

Assistant Farm Manager, Chef and Food Educator, Vegetable Gardening and Apprentice positions open at Red Fire Farm, a certified organic vegetable farm in Western Massachusetts. Red Fire is the largest CSA serving the Boston area and the Five College area. We are a financially successful farm with diverse markets. Located in the vibrant Five-College area. Compensation varies by position, some salaried, some includes housing, food, stipend, and health insurance. Please visit www.redfirefarm. com for position descriptions. Contact Ryan: 413-467-7645, redfirefarm@gmail.com

Farm Manager sought for Full Moon Farm, an established organic 180 member CSA in northern Vermont. We are relocating to a gorgeous 150 acre parcel where we can expand (250-300 members) to include seasonal help, seasonal and year end bonus. To apply, send a letter of intent and resume to Paul Bucciaglia, Fort Hill Farm, 18 Fort Hill Rd., New Milford, CT 06776. Also see www.forthillfarm.com.

D Acres of NH is a non-profit, farm based service organization that promotes Sustainability through practice, experimentation, workshops, tours, and community outreach. In 2008, our theme is Gardening for Health: Cultivating Wellness. Programs will include experiential learning opportunities in medicinal and at risk plant species identification and use, whole foods cooking and nutrition, gardening as exercise, soil building, the benefits of organic agriculture, and non-toxic natural building. Check our website for updates & additions to our Cultivating Wellness Conference featuring regional speakers and practitioners, to be held September 13 & 14, 2008. 603.786.2366 info@dacres.org www.dacres.org

Town Farm Dairy, a 35 cow certified organic dairy farm in Simsbury, Connecticut that processes all of its own milk, is seeking an intern to start immediately. The internship will include all aspects of the farm work from milking to processing and sales and distribution as well as educational opportunities. We provide housing on the farm, workman’s compensation, and a monthly stipend of $600-750. To find out more information and to schedule an interview call Dan Demaine at (860) 408-1335 or send an email to dan@mainefarm.org. Also, visit www.townfarmdairy.org to find out more about the farm.

Youth & Garden Program Assistant needed at Youth Horticulture Project of University of Vermont Extension. The Youth Horticulture Project helps at-risk youth experience success while they develop job and life skills through the growing, harvesting and marketing of vegetable crops. Lead young people in their work on the farm and in the community. Part take in educating youth from diverse backgrounds on the importance of a healthy, local agriculture as well as engaging them directly in an experience of enterprise and community service. For more information and/or to apply please contact: Sara Coblyn Porth, (802)257-7967 or sara.porth@uvm.edu.

www.agri-dynamics.com Toll Free: 1.877.393.4484

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AgriLab, Inc. provides technical service to recover heat from aerated compost systems. The technology moves heated vapor across closed loop of charged tubes to collect and capture the heat that averages 120-150 °F produced by the composting process. The system can be used for a variety of purposes. On one farm in Vermont it is used to heat a 250 head calf barn, using radiant loop heat coils embedded in concrete flooring. The heat is also utilized to pre-heat hot water needs required for sanitization, washing and feed preparation needs. Installation of the technology generally qualifies under most “Best Management Practices” programs including EQIP, VT BMP, and innovative and alternative manure management programs.

source: AgriLab press release

Organic Food Better
Important new research from a major British study has shown up to 40% more beneficial chemicals in organic vegetable crops and up to 90% more in organic milk. It has also found high levels of minerals such as iron and zinc in organic produce.

source: http://www.gmwatch.org/archive2.asp?arcid=8430

Plants Absorb Antibiotics
University of Minnesota scientists have found that plants grown in soil fertilized with hog manure containing sulfamethazine, a common veterinary antibiotic, contained traces of the drug in their leaves. The higher the concentration in the manure, the higher in the leaves. The plants involved were corn, lettuce, and potatoes.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Consumers Concerned about Corporate Practices
A recent study has found that 87 percent of US consumers would switch from one brand to another if the other brand were associated with a good cause. This is an increase of 31 percent since 1993. Environmental concerns ranked number two with consumers, after health concerns.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Maine Allows GE Corn
The Maine Board of Pesticide Control has voted to allow Dow, Monsanto and Pioneer to sell their Bt corn in Maine. Member Richard Stevenson said “If we don’t take advantage of this technology, these farmers may not be here 5 or 10 years down the road.” Organic farmers, of course vociferously opposed the decision.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Chemicals Reduce Crop Yields
A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has found that widespread use of nitrogen fertilizers and pesticides over the last half-century have lessened the symbiotic nitrogen fixation brought about by Rhizobium bacteria. The result has been the reduction of plant yield by one-third.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Ethanol and Food Prices
About 20% of the 2006 US corn crop was turned into ethanol, and corn prices jumped from roughly $2 a bushel in January of 2006 to nearly $4 this spring. Several food companies, such as Heinz, Kellogg’s, Coca-Cola, Del Monte, the National Chicken Council and the Grocery Manufacturer’s Association have asked Congress to reconsider accelerating conversion of the nation’s corn crop into ethanol. They are worried about rising food prices because of higher costs to processors and livestock producers.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Interactive Factory Farm Map Online
Food and Water Watch has put an interactive map online at www.factoryfarmmap.org. The map shows the number of factories based on factory farms, and the number of factory farms, in each state and county in the United States. The concentration of factory farms in some states is clearly illustrated.

source: Food and Water Watch press release, September 24, 2007

Price-Fixing OK
A recent Supreme Court decision overturned the antitrust ban on corporations fixing minimum prices for their products at retail. This is expected to drive food prices higher. The judges overturning the ban were Kennedy, Roberts, Scalia, Thomas, and Alito.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Rain Follows the Plow
With this phrase, Charles Dana Wilbur in a 1881 book popularized the notion that the Great Plains, which was called the Great American Desert in the early 1800s, could be transformed into a garden by opening up the sod-covered moist soil to the atmosphere. Although the wheat farmers who first tried it didn’t change the weather, the more heavily transpiring (and more heavily aquifer-irrigated) corn which is increasingly grown there now seems to be doing so. In relatively short periods, evaporation from corn seems to generate air movements that can lead to storms through which water is cycled. This is the argument of Richard Raddatz, climatologist at the University of Winnipeg, who has published a summary of studies of cropping and weather in the journal Agricultural and Forest Meteorology. As more corn is planted, and in closer rows, this effect is just increasing, he says.

source: New Jersey Record, Friday, July 27, 2007

Coffee Fights Cancer?
Researchers at the Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche in Milan, Italy, after reviewing 2500 cases of liver cancer, have found a 41% reduction in the risk of the cancer among coffee drinkers. Those drinking 3 or more cups a day had a 55% lower risk, and those who drank less than three cups had a 30% lower risk. Certain compounds in coffee may block enzymes involved in the growth of cancer, they believe.


Organic Acreage Growing Worldwide
Thirty-one million hectares are certified for organic production worldwide. Argentina leads with 3.1 million, followed by China with 2.1 million. The US has 400,000 hectares, followed by Italy with 110,000. The value of global organic production reached $34.3 billion in 2005, with most consumed in North America and Europe.


OMRI Approves Organic Herbicides, Pesticides and Repellants
The Organic Materials Review Institute has approved two citrus oil-based herbicides for use in organic agriculture. Nature’s Avenger Organic Herbicide is for gardeners, and Green Match O is for farmers. Also approved was Sluggo Plus, a slug and snail bait containing iron phosphate and spinosad, useful against cutworms, earwigs, sow bugs and pill bugs. Cedar Gard is a cedar oil product which repels aphids, caterpillars, bugs, scale and powdery mildew.

source: Acres USA, September, 2007, Growing for Market, September 2007

OFRF Grants Due December 17
California’s Organic Farming Research Foundation gives research grants to farmers and researchers in the US, Canada, and Mexico. To learn more about this program, call 831-426-6606 or visit www.ofrf.org.


SARE Farmer Grants Due December 18
Farmers who want to test a new practice or idea by conducting an on-farm trial or experiment can get financial assistance from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. To learn more about this program, contact SARE at www.uman.edu/~nesare or call 802-656-0471.

source: SARE press release, September 2007

Organophosphate Breakdown Products Even Worse
A study by the US Geological Survey has found that the breakdown products of organophosphate pesticides such as chlorpyrifos and malathion are at least 100 times as toxic as the parent compounds, and those of diazinon are 10 times as toxic.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

Organic and Fair Trade Gain in Popularity
A new United Kingdom study shows that more than 37% of buyers are willing to pay more for organic and Fair Trade products, up from 24% in 2002. Sales of organic food in Britain has passed the £1 billion level and faces “serious supply shortages” according to The Grocer. Fair Trade sales have increased 40% from 2005 to 2006, and in the US organic Fair Trade coffee has grown by 94%.

source: Acres USA, September 2007

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source: Acres USA, September 2007

Organic Meat and Dairy Improves Breast Milk
A study published in the British Journal of Nutrition has found that organic dairy and meat products in a mother’s diet increased beneficial fatty acids in her breast milk, positively affecting its nutritional quality for the child. It is available at www.organic-center.org/science.hot.php?action=view&report_id=101

source: The Organic Broadcaster, Sept. – Oct. 2007
Update on E. coli and Salad Greens
Earthbound Farm, the source of the E. coli contaminated spinach that killed three and made 200 ill last fall, now tests every load of greens coming into its facility for pathogens. So far, 58 out of 76,000 lots have tested positive, a rate of 0.08%. Investigators were dispatched to those fields the next day, but the sources of contamination remain unknown. Microbiologist Mansour Samadpour says simply of the chances of another tragedy: “You can reduce; you cannot eliminate.”

source: Growing for Market, September 2007

Clone Labeling Law Passes in California
California has passed the first law in the nation requiring labels on meat or dairy products produced from animal clones or their offspring. The Center for Food Safety says there is little evidence one way or the other about the safety of food from clones, but that the technology is inherently cruel to animals.


Venezuela Proposes Sweeping Ban on GMOs
President Hugo Chavez Frias has terminated a plan by Monsanto to plant 500,000 acres in Venezuela to transgenic soybeans, and announced that the country will ban genetically modified crops anywhere on its soil. He stated GM crops are contrary to the interests of the nation’s farmers and farmworkers.

source: Venezulanalysis.com

International Wheat Price Skyrockets
Global inventories of wheat are projected to drop to the lowest level in 26 years says the USDA, and international prices for the grain are spiking. In part driven by the demand for biofuels and resulting in a climb in the price of petroleum-based fuels, tougher immigration enforcement and a late spring freeze in some areas are all contributing to grocery sticker shock.

source: Acres USA, October 2007

FDA Cracks Down On Natural Herbal Sweetener, Stevia
The FDA, under pressure from the powerful sugar and artificial sweetener lobby, has issued a warning letter to Celestial Seasonings for using a popular natural sweetener in some of its teas. The letter indicates the FDA classifies the herb stevia as “unsafe”, even though it is a main staple sweetener in countries like China and Japan and has been used without negative health effects by indigenous people for at least 400 years. In the FDA’s letter to Celestial Seasonings, the agency aggressively condemns the use of the herb, noting that “enforcement action may include seizure of violative products”. The FDA claims no evidence has been provided to the agency regarding the herb’s safety, but federal records reveal the FDA has received over a thousand scientific studies regarding stevia, and all but one of them verify the safety of the herb. In sharp contrast, nearly half of the studies provided to the FDA regarding the artificial sweetener aspartame, previously owned by Monsanto, indicate serious health concerns, yet it is one of the most commonly used and (one of the most profitable) sweeteners in the U.S.


USDA Announces Grass-fed Meat Standards
After a 5-year wait, the US Department of Agriculture has released the final standards for a voluntary grass-fed label claim as it would apply to ruminant animals and meat derived from those animals. The original proposal called for only 80% of the animal’s diet to be grass-based. But the new standard is 100% grass and non-grain based forage, with the exception of milk (or milk replacer) prior to weaning. Animals cannot be fed grain or grain byproducts and must have continuous access to pasture during the growing season. A small loophole reads: “If incidental supplementation occurs due to inadvertent exposure to non-forage feedstuffs or to ensure the animal’s wellbeing at all times during adverse environmental or physical conditions, the producer must fully document...the supplementation that occurs.” That appears reasonable enough, but bears careful watching as the USDA has allowed cattle drives through such loopholes before!

source: Center for Rural Affairs newsletter, November 2007

Domestic Food Prices Soar
Labor Department figures show food prices up 4.2% for the last 12 months, but certain essentials rose much more. Eggs are up 33% and whole milk 21%. High corn prices because of biofuel demand, the climb in the price of petroleum-based fuels, tougher immigration enforcement and a late spring freeze in some areas are all contributing to grocery sticker shock.

source: Acres USA, October 2007

German Court Protects Honey from GMO Contamination
A German beekeeper, Thomas Radetzki, went to court to seek protection for his bees from pollen from genetically engineered corn (MON 810) planted by a neighboring state farm. Under German law consumers simply have to accept contamination of up to 0.9% of GM materials in food. An administrative court in Augsburg has ruled that honey containing pollen from MON 810 is unsellable and the state of Bavaria must either plow up the crop, or render its pollen harmless.

source: NOFA-NH newsletter, Fall 2007

Soft Drinks and DNA
It has long been known that sodium benzoate, a common preservative in soft drinks, creates benzene when mixed with vitamin C. Now, in an article in the British journal Nature, the authors have stated that sodium benzoate and related chemicals “have the ability to cause severe damage to DNA in the mitochondria to the point that they totally inactivate it.” The mitochondria consume oxygen to give the body energy and damage to it results in serious cellular malfunction. According to Piper an array of diseases are now being tied to such damage, including Parkinson’s, various neurodegenerative diseases and ageing generally. Currently testing equipment is far more sophisticated now than when the FDA and its equivalents declared sodium benzoate safe, he maintains.

source: Acres USA, October 2007

“No Farms No Food” Bumper Stickers Available
The American Farmland Trust is giving away “No Farms No Food” bumper stickers for distribution at local events. They can be ordered online at www.farmland.org/bumpersticker or by phone at 800-886-5170.

source: Farmers’ Markets Today, October 2007

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Industry-Driven Food Safety Approach Threatens Local Food Movement

California Senator Dianne Feinstein on November 6 introduced a Leafy Greens Amendment (No. 3505) to the 2007 Farm Bill. Feinstein’s amendment would make it possible to regulate all leafy green vegetable production in the United States, and could negatively impact thousands of traditional leafy green farmers, effectively eliminating access to local leafy greens nationwide. Feinstein’s proposed marketing order approach allows the industry to dictate the scope and rules to every farmer in the country, including producers of traditional whole leafy green vegetables who have not been shown to have a food safety problem.

“A national marketing order is not the way to regulate food safety. If this approach is extended to other crops, it will become nearly impossible for small farmers to comply with the impractical regulations being proposed,” said Kira Puscoe, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) spokesperson.

Such rules have been used as a precedent to strike against the heart of biological agriculture, calling for sterile zones on farms, fences to keep wildlife out, cancellation of conservation projects and removal of grassed waterways. “In addition to threatening farmers nationwide, most of the rules that require degrading the environment for safe food are not scientifically proven,” Puscoe added. “The choice should not be between food safety and the environment, especially when research shows that practices like wetlands and microbial diversity in soil may actually reduce pathogens.”

source: CAFF press release, November 13, 2007

Farm Bureau Ousts Farmer

The Texas County, Missouri Farm Bureau has Farm Bureau Ousts Farmer.expelled farmer Bob Parker for his outspoken comments for the program would make it impossible for those small producers anyway. What good are they saying the program would make it impossible for expulsion, but president Don Luersson said they (NAIS). The group’s by-laws have no provision for expulsion farmer Bob Parker for his outspoken comments. Such rules have been used as a precedent to strike against the heart of biological agriculture, calling for sterile zones on farms, fences to keep wildlife out, cancellation of conservation projects and removal of grassed waterways. “In addition to threatening farmers nationwide, most of the rules that require degrading the environment for safe food are not scientifically proven,” Puscoe added. “The choice should not be between food safety and the environment, especially when research shows that practices like wetlands and microbial diversity in soil may actually reduce pathogens.”

source: Acres USA, October 2007

UK’s Soil Association to Require “Ethical Trade Standards” for Organic Air Imports

Food flown into the UK will be stripped of its organic status unless it meets new stricter ethical standards, the Soil Association has warned. The association, which certifies 70% of the UK’s £1.9bn organic food sector, says firms must show trade brings real benefit to developing world farmers. It wants all air-freighted food to meet tough “ethical trade” standards. The group says few overseas firms currently meet the planned new standards. The rules will affect the 1% of the organic food market in the UK which is flown in from abroad, about 80% of which comes from low to lower-middle income countries. The association’s policy director Peter Melchett said some overseas producers would find it impossible to meet the standards. “One of the things we assume this will do is eliminate the usual use of air freight,” he added. Anna Bradley, chair of the Soil Association’s standards board, said: “It is neither sustainable nor responsible to encourage poorer farmers to be reliant on air freight, but we recognize that building alternative markets that offer the same social and economic benefits as organic exports will take time.” The association has decided not to remove organic status from all air-freighted food saying that would hit producers in the developing world too hard.

source: BBC News, October 25, 2007

Article Helps Organic Farmers Understand Laws Prohibiting Use of GMOs

Most organic farmers are aware that they may not plant genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or seeds developed through genetic engineering, if they wish to market their crops as organic. Yet they may have questions about their legal rights and responsibilities with respect to the unintended presence of GMOs. Organic farmers and farmers transitioning to organic production need information about the regulations governing organic certification. To try to meet the need for legal information, Farmers’ Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) has written a new article, If Your Farm Is Organic, Must It Be GMO Free? Organic Farmers, Genetically Modified Organisms, and the Law. A free copy of the 40-page article can be downloaded by visiting FLAG’s website, www.flaginc.org.

source: FLAG press release, October, 2007

The Nitrogen-Carbon Myth

A study published in the latest issue of the Journal of Environmental Quality, suggests that over-applying nitrogen fertilizer on field crops is more likely a contributor to greenhouse gas production, a key factor in global warming, than an aid in carbon sequestration, the soaking up of it by the soil. “It’s just the opposite of what conventional wisdom has preached since we began using heavy doses of N on crops 50 years ago,” says Richard Mulvaney, one of four University of Illinois agronomists who conducted the soil carbon research. “My colleagues and I were simply amazed when we examined the data.”

“Now view those giant anhydrous ammonia tanks injecting nitrogen all over as giant soil burners,” relates Mulvaney from his campus office in the middle of a million acres of Illinois corn, “and the farmers driving them as unguided missiles.”

If that view appears bold for normally-reserved agronomists, he and colleagues S.A. Khan, T.R. Ellsworth and S.W. Boast, were equally bold when telling their research paper for the Journal: “The Myth of Nitrogen Fertilization for Soil Carbon Sequestration,” (available at http://jeq.scijournals.org/).

source: eFarm and Food File, November 9, 2007

New USDA Secretary Appointed

President Bush nominated Edward Schafer, a former two-term Republican governor from North Dakota, to be his next Secretary of Agriculture. Schafer, who chose not to run again in North Dakota in 2000, will replace Mike Johanns, who resigned as U.S. agriculture secretary last month to launch a bid for the Nebraska Senate seat being vacated by Republican Chuck Hagel at the end of next year. According to an online search, Ed Schafer was the former co-chairman of the Governors Biotechnology Partnership. He was instrumental in getting former Pres. Clinton to back off of requirements that GM foods be labeled as such. The Governor has let his constituents know his feelings about the “new agriculture: “Genetic engineering will make farms smaller, more specialized and more profitable.”


and Newsvine...http://www.newsvine.com/news/2007/10/31/1063871-bush-to-name-new-agriculture-secretary#c114804

The Natural Farmer

Winter, 2007-08

Fertilizers:
Azmomite
Cheep Cheep 4-3-3
Chilean Nitr rate 16-0-0
Greensand
Greensand Plus 0-0-17
Kelp Meal
Natural Sulfate of Potash 0-0-51
Organic Gem 3-3-3
Phosphate Rock 0-3-0
Phosphate Rock and Greensand Mix
Pro-Gro 5-3-4
Pro-Start 2-3-3
Stress-X Powder

Livestock Nutritional:
Redmond Trace Mineral Conditioner, Salt Blocks & Granular Salt

Pest Controls:
Horticultural Oil
PowderGard
Pyganic
Seacide
Surround

*Many of our products that are not OMRI listed may be allowed for use on a certified organic farm. Check with your certification representative to be sure.
Collin Peterson: Paying More for Organic or Local Food is “Dumb”

Collin Peterson, chairman of the House of Representatives agricultural committee, says the farm sector needs organic produce and grass-fed beef for local consumers needs little federal help. “It is growing, and it has nothing to do with the government," he told the FT. “For whatever reason, people are willing to pay two or three times as much for something that says ‘organic’ or ‘local’. Far be it from me to understand what that’s about, but that’s it. And if people are dumb enough to pay that much then hallelujah.”

The USDA lets in more immigrants for farms

US Let's in More Immigrants for Farms

With a nationwide farmworker shortage threatening to leave unharvested fruits and vegetables rotting in fields, the Bush administration has begun quietly revising federal regulations to establish a new guest worker program. If finalized, the plan would ease a ban that restricts how foreign laborers can legally be brought into the country. The effort, uncertainly underway as the administration struggles to win Homeland Security, State, and Labor, is meant to ensure that farm workers caught in a vise between a complex process to hire legal guest workers and stepped-up enforcement that has reduced the numbers of visa fraud, are not forced to leave. "It is important for the farm sector to have access to labor to stay competitive," said White House spokesman Scott Danzler. About three-quarters of farmworkers are thought to be illegal immigrants.

On all sides of the farm industry, the administration's human-capital initiative to revamp H-2A farmworker visas is fraught with anxiety. Advocates for immigrant farmers fear the changes will come at the expense of worker protections because the administration has received and is reportedly acting on extensive input from farm lobbyists. And farmers in areas such as the San Joaquin Valley, which is experiencing a 20% labor shortfall, worry the administration's changes will not happen soon enough for the 2008 growing season.

Almost all of the three federal agencies are scrutinizing the regulations to see whether they can adjust the farmworker program, an unwieldy system used by less than 2% of American farms to bring in foreign workers. It means considering a series of changes, including lengthening the time workers can stay, expanding the types of work they can do, simplifying how their applications are processed, and defining terms such as “temporary.”

The changes to the H-2A visa program comprise one of more than two dozen initiatives the administration announced in August. Most of the initiatives dealt with increased enforcement, the most prominent being a measure that would force employers to either fire workers for whom they've received "not match" notifications (indicating their W-2 data don't match Social Security Administration records) or face punitive action from the Department of Homeland Security. When Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff announced the enforcement push, he also acknowledged the problems that agriculture reported.

Growers also complain about paying for workers' housing, transportation, visas and other fees. Harry Yates, a North Carolina Christmas-tree grower, estimates that his labor costs for H-2A workers are about $8 an hour, compared with a competitor whose illegal laborers cost about $7.50 an hour. Like other farmers, Yates said using the H-2A program was an invitation to lawsuits from farm worker advocates and frequent government investigations.

“I understand why so many growers are afraid to use this program. It is too expensive, too complicated, too slow and too likely to land you in court," Yates said.

Some of the suggestions under consideration include changing the requirements farmers must use to hire U.S. citizens first. Currently farmers have to advertise the jobs, then submit applications to Labor and then are required to bring in foreign workers. Growers would prefer to move to a system in which they pledged that they had done all they could to recruit U.S. workers, but no longer had to show an inability to hire U.S. workers.

Other changes under consideration would simplify the detailed H-2A housing requirements, extend the definition of “temporary” beyond 10 months, and the creation of “agricultural” workers to include such industries as meatpacking and poultry processing.

The administration has pursued the project discreetly. The issue of immigration has generated friction between President Bush and the conservative wing of the Republican Party, which has strongly opposed three of the initiatives that Bush has pursued.

Ron Paul Files Raw Milk Bill

On November 5 Congressman Ron Paul filed a bill to allow sale and transport of raw milk in interstate commerce, as long as the milk both originates from and is shipped to states that allow the sale of unpasteurized milk and milk products. “My office has heard from numerous people who would like to see this salary program for the farm workers because many of these people have done their own research and come to the conclusion that unpasteurized milk is healthier than pasteurized milk. These Americans think it is the right thing to do, and are concerned about having the Federal Government second-guess their judgment about what products best promote health. If there are legitimate concerns about the safety of unpasteurized milk, those concerns should be addressed at the State and local level.”

Judge Suspends Key Bush Effort in Immigration

A federal judge in San Francisco ordered an indefinite delay yesterday of a central measure of the Bush administration’s new strategy to deport illegal immigrants. US District Judge David W. Breyer of the Northern District of California, said the government had failed to follow proper legal process when it threatened to fire workers if their Social Security numbers could not be verified within three months. Judge Breyer chastised the Department of Homeland Security for making a “poor change with “massive ramifications” for employers, without giving any legal explanation or conducting a required survey of the costs and impact for small businesses.

Under the rule issued by the department, which had been scheduled to take effect last month, employers were required to fire workers within 90 days after receiving a notice from the Social Security Administration that an employee’s identity information did not match the agency’s records. Illegal immigrants often present false Social Security information when applying for jobs. The rule, announced with fanfare in August by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, was the linchpin of the administration’s effort to crack down on illegal immigration by denying jobs to the immigrants. It is part of a campaign of stepped-up enforcement. Other immigration legislation favored by President Bush was rejected by Congress in June. If allowed to take effect, the judge found, the rule could lead to the firing of thousands of legal workers, a result that would result in “irreparable harm to innocent workers and employers.” Judge Breyer found that the Social Security database that the rule would draw upon was laced with many thousands of errors, an immigration status, which could result in no-match letters being sent to legally authorized workers. The cases is for—immigrants whose Social Security numbers could not be verified within 90 days, even if they are legal, he wrote.

The decision brought a sense of relief to the unusual coalition behind the lawsuit, including the AFL-CIO and the United States Chamber of Commerce, often adversaries. They had feared that the measure would bring mass layoffs in low-wage industries, resulting in “irreparable harm to innocent workers and employers.” Judge Breyer found that the Social Security database that the rule would draw upon was laced with many thousands of errors, an immigration status, which could result in no-match letters being sent to legally authorized workers. The cases is for—immigrants whose Social Security numbers could not be verified within 90 days, even if they are legal, he wrote.

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Special Supplement on Labor on Organic Farms

by Elizabeth Henderson

Extracts from Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen’s Guide to Community Supported Agriculture (Chelsea Green, 2007); this new edition will be available from the author and the publisher by the end of November 2007.

There are never too many hands to do all the work on a small farm, and rarely enough dollars to pay for all the work that needs to be done. What makes a small farm a wonderful place to work is the great variety of jobs and the chance to be outdoors in all weather. Some of the jobs require technical training; other jobs are simple and repetitive, though skill and experience can greatly alter the pace. In our culture, when people eat they rarely think about the many workers who have put their time and energies into planting, nurturing, harvesting, packing, shipping and distributing the food. Through local fair trade, more citizen consumers will learn about the effort that goes into what they eat. The food actually tastes better to many of them when they feel secure in the knowledge that the workers up and down the food chain have enjoyed decent salaries and safe working conditions.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) statistics, off-farm earnings help support 84 percent of the farms in this country. The unpaid labor of the farm family is essential. When the workload swells beyond what the family can manage, farms must shoulder the expense of hiring workers or take on trainees. CSA farms are no exception, but they have the exceptional opportunity to get help from a new source—the members.

Everything depends on how you ask the question. While CSA members and potential members, when polled, claim that they do not have time to participate, what people say does not always coincide with what they are willing to do. If a survey asks, “Do you want to work on the farm or take a job in the core group?” most people respond with a self-defensive “No!” At least two other approaches work better. If, from the beginning, farmers and members discuss how to get help from a new source—the members.

Family Work

Losing a farm blurs the line between life and work—it is a lifestyle choice that usually means less cash, fewer consumer amenities, and more physical labor. People should enter farming knowing this. Farming is a hard life, therefore nobody ought to live it. What a remarkable conclusion. There are several steps that are left out. What causes the difficulty? Does freedom come out of it? Does family pride come with it, family coherence? Does some kind of idea of unpaid family labor make agricultural economists squirm. Rarely calculated or remunerated in dollars per hour, that family labor is basic to the whole economy of an integrated farm, where one of the main “products” is the people. Sure, some people who grew up on farms look back in horror at their childhood slavery and swear, “Never again.” They barricade themselves in a life of office work or whatever else is as far as possible from picking beans on the farm. But many more farm-raised people feel nostalgic about the hours spent close to parents, remembering the many sensual pleasures of sounds and smells that folded in with the work. Doing chores and being expected to take responsibility are good for children. When they are really needed, they rise to the task. Old-fashioned as it may sound, having to work builds character. How else are we going to raise fewer couch potatoes and more active citizens? Learning that physical labor is good for the body and for the soul, and seeing parents involved in meaningful activity never hurt anyone.

There are limits, however, and the economic pressures on small farms have all too often forced farmers to unload themselves and their families. Many love relationships have turned sour under the strain of picking too many vegetables for market. (The real dirt behind The Real Dirt is that few of the farm families we interviewed back in 1990 have remained together.) Should we then conclude that the work itself is the problem? Or rather that we need to change the economics and learn how to organize the work better? In a conversation about the push to save people from the drudgery of small farms, Wendell Berry exclaimed:

“Farming is a hard life. That’s what these rural sociologists were talking about in the start. It’s a hard life, therefore nobody ought to live it. What a remarkable conclusion. There are several steps that are left out. What causes the difficulty? Does freedom come out of it? Does family pride come with it, family coherence? Does some kind of idea of unpaid family labor make agricultural economists squirm. Rarely calculated or remunerated in dollars per hour, that family labor is basic to the whole economy of an integrated farm, where one of the main “products” is the people. Sure, some people who grew up on farms look back in horror at their childhood slavery and swear, “Never again.” They barricade themselves in a life of office work or whatever else is as far as possible from picking beans on the farm. But many more farm-raised people feel nostalgic about the hours spent close to parents, remembering the many sensual pleasures of sounds and smells that folded in with the work. Doing chores and being expected to take responsibility are good for children. When they are really needed, they rise to the task. Old-fashioned as it may sound, having to work builds character. How else are we going to raise fewer couch potatoes and more active citizens? Learning that physical labor is good for the body and for the soul, and seeing parents involved in meaningful activity never hurt anyone.

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feminine approaches complement each other. In reality, too often these differences are a source of friction. I have talked to farmers who run successful farms in partnerships with close relatives. When they ask me what was most important for working together, their answers were similar: the ability to forgive and to place the family ahead of the farm.

On the mythical family farm, husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors all work together in cooperation and harmony. Mutual respect and appreciation govern relations between sexes and generations. When differences of opinion occur, the people involved take the time to sit down and talk through the issues. They work only as long as they can live up to this myth! In reality, all too often tempers flare; in the pressure of the moment, people who care deeply for one another say things and do things that hurt. How can we move our reality closer to the myth?

At the Northeast CSA Conference in 1999, a diverse group gathered for a workshop on the topic “Women and Men Working Together.” There were two of us who had left farms where relationships did not work out with partners, two young men who were about to start farming with their female partners, two young women who farm with men, a woman who has been farming for many years with her male partner, and one farmer working with her ex-husband although they live separately. Everyone contributed to our lively discussion. We concluded by listing a series of recommendations to help ourselves and our partners work more harmoniously and productively together:

• Don’t let irritations and disagreements accumulate till an explosion occurs. When a difference occurs, note the context and skip the generalizations. Use conflict resolution and hold regular meetings. Differences in sensibility can be a source of richness or of increasing irritation. Honor deeply your own perspective and the other person’s.

• Balance expertise and nurturance skills. Take turns teaching or learning. Expose each other to the different roles when possible so that we all learn and become more complete.

• Coordinate roles and exchange these when possible to learn the perspective of the other role.

• Write a contract (the publisher Nolo has helpful models. See www.nolo.com).

• Resolve issues by the end of the day—don’t go to bed angry or anxious.

• Learn to teach differing skills—how to give enough help and how to give the least amount of help to another person.

• Turn to others for instruction. Our community needs to offer training in critical skills.

• We take this farming way too seriously. Build in play and social time. Have fun!

Hiring Help

If you decide to hire workers, you enter a maze of state and federal regulations. Neil Hamilton’s The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing is a helpful resource for hiring and other issues; remember, though, that Neil is a lawyer and gives the most cautious interpretation of each situation. For those who have never had employees before, the first step should be the Internal Revenue Service—Circular A, the Agricultural Employer’s Tax Guide. This document will lead you through the steps you must take. You can call (800) TAX-FORM, and a good day later will send you what you need. The Economic Research Service offers the comprehensive “Summary of Federal Laws and Regulations Affecting Agricultural Employers, 2000,” by Jack L. Runyan, which covers agricultural employers’ federal safety requirements, migrant and seasonal farmworker provisions, and tax-related issues. The annual Agricultural Outlook Handout No. 19, July 2000, is available online at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ah719/ In many states, the Cooperative Extension Service—the nearest office of the state’s university—is a good place to begin. The labor department will be able to provide you with information. In New York, FarmNet, a nonprofit based at Cornell University but supported by tax dollars as a part of the Environmental Protection Agency, is helping farmers on financial as well as psychological matters. Other states may have similar services.

The simplest course for getting started might be to consult with a neighboring farmer who handles the paperwork for his or her own employees. Some states have a tax guide for new businesses. For all employees earning over $150 a year, the employer is responsible for Social Security and Medicare withholdings. The combined tax rate is 15.3 percent of gross cash wages (this does not include payments in kind, such as farm product or lodging). The employer deducts half from employee gross wages and pays the other half to the government. To determine how much money the employer must withhold for the federal income tax, new employees will need to fill out W-4 forms. The employer is then required to deposit all of the Social Security and Medicare, and withholding income tax at an authorized bank. A special deposit coupon (Form 8109) must accompany these deposits. If the figure is less than $600, employers must file Form 943, Employer’s Annual Tax Return for Agricultural Employees, and send a W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, to each employee. Each state has different rules for state tax requirements. Calling the state tax number should furnish the appropriate regulations and forms. Employers must fill out an I-9 form for each employee to document citizenship, age, and social security number and keep on file for at least three years. Federal law requires that all employers must also purchase workers’ compensation insurance, which varies in price from state to state. Although the rates are set at the state level, the various kinds of farms have different risk pools. An uninsured employer is liable for the costs of medical treatment for work-related injury or illness and fines for failure to carry insurance.

To hire the most people properly, you must have an Employer Identification Number (EIN), which functions like a Social Security number for tracking you through the system. To get one, fill out and mail (Internal Revenue Service Form SS-4). You can complete this process over the phone in a few minutes. Special laws regulate the hiring of youngsters under sixteen years of age who are not members of the employer’s family. You must make sure they have working papers and that you do not ask them to do jobs that are forbidden by law, such as driving equipment. The fines for violating these regulations are considerable. Putting your own children to work may not look like a bad alternative after all!

Finding really good, steady help is not easy. The pool of U.S. citizens willing to do farmwork is shockingly small. The ideal employee is a local person whom you can train and keep for a long time. The reality is that immigrant farmworkers do a large portion of the weeding, picking, and packing of vegetables in this country. U.S. labor laws specifically exclude agricultural workers from some of the protections granted to workers in other sectors, such as the right to organize and time-and-a-half for overtime. When small-scale organic farmers expand beyond the one- to five-acre size that a single family can typically manage, they may discover that in most cases skilled farmworkers do this work faster and more reliably than reluctant teenagers or family members. In the suburbs, the role of boss, many organic farmers retain their greater obligation to instruct. They expect you to figure out whether to take on interns and what training and evaluation process. Finally, Miranda Smith built on five years of discussions and her own experience to write The On-Farm Mentor’s Guide—Practical Advice and Recipes for Success (University of Vermont, 2006), which completes the series. This book should be required reading for any farmer who trains interns.

In the draft version of “Internships in Sustainable Farming: A Handbook for Farmers,” Doug Jones sums up the difference between hired workers and interns:

“Workers usually do specialized work in one area of the farm; they often have prior experience. As they receive an hourly wage and usually do not live with you. State and federal governments have many regulations and officials assigned to protect workers from exploitation and assure that the adversarial relationship is assumed to exist.

With interns, on the other hand, you have a much greater obligation to instruct. They expect you to explain the “whys,” not just the “hows.” They deserve a diversified learning experience through both a broad exposure to many different tasks, as well as through frequent discussion of the overall goals, methods, and systems of the farm. They
are preparing themselves for a vocation, or at least learning how to grow their own food. Interns usually live on the farm, expect to interact socially with you, and may wish to learn a variety of rural living skills. Most farms pay interns a stipend, which typically covers expenses, and pay a modest fee or compensate them with goods and produce. You must always pay the intern a wage, and you may wish to pay a modest fee, or compensate them with goods and produce.

So, if you are willing and able to teach while you work, interns may be the answer to your labor shortage. The research that Eric Toensmeier did for the On-Farm Mentor's Guide reveals completely that, however special the relationship may seem to you, the authorities will consider your interns or apprentices employees. The On-Farm Mentor's Guide provides some guidelines to help you comply with the many laws and regulations that govern agricultural employment.

In my experience, when you find the right people, interns not only lighten your workload but also make the work itself more pleasant. Working with some of my former interns, I always get a thrill at seeing what you are doing can transform an otherwise routine task. When you explain to your intern how a repetitive job fits in the context of the farm’s operation, you will see the interconnections that are so essential to a sustainable farm. I still keep in touch with most of my former interns. Several have gone on to farm on their own, and six run CSAs, so our paths continue to cross in mutually beneficial ways.

Taking on interns has a broader importance as well. If we want family-scale organic farming to continue to grow, experienced farmers must learn how to pass on their knowledge. “We need thousands, tens of thousands of new farmers!” exclaimed Paul Bernacky in a presentation on apprenticeships at the 1997 Northeast CSA Conference. The practical skills of farming are not part of the curriculum of many schools. A few institutions are starting to catch up with the encouraging demand for this kind of learning. In the meantime, those of us who are doing it need to train an entire generation from scratch in local, sustainable food production and all the skills involved.

Most of the people who are interested in learning to farm come from non-farm backgrounds. They have a double set of lessons ahead: learning how to do the farming work and learning to farm. LaBrake, who runs a two-year internship program at the Ecosystem Farm sponsored by the Accokeek Foundation in Maryland, divides these differently into two parts. Students learn the interdependent systems and philosophies of farming and then attend classes. In my experience, interns who have not farmed before need six to eight weeks to develop a clear idea of where they want to focus. At this point well into the season, it is a good time to ask them to draw up a learning contract, outlining what skills they especially want to acquire. Mid-season and again at the end of the season, you can do a mutual evaluation of how well both sides have fulfilled the contract, the intern through learning and the farmer through teaching.

Many of the farmers who hire interns worry about what to pay. The law requires minimum wage and all the other payments. There are other, larger expenses, including Social Security, Medicare, and workers’ compensation insurance. That does not compensate the farmer in any way for the value of the education provided (frankly, why would you be likely to get into trouble if you charge the intern that you pay them?) to keep the pay at an amount a farm can afford, the farmer may charge the interns for room and board at rates set by state laws. There can also be a charge for instruction, but this payment must be counted as part of the farmer’s income.

There are many internship listings and programs around the country through which a farm can advertise for candidates and potential interns can seek placements. Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) has assembled the most comprehensive list of both individual farms and organizational programs. If you call their toll-free number, (800) 346-9190, they will send you a copy in short order. Or go to www.attra.org.

We can experience farm labor as an ecstasy of movement with the seasons, as the farmer, member of the Genesee Valley Organic CSA, wrote, “When we dig our hands into the brown, damp soil, does not the entire Earth tremble? When we plant seeds and eat green, living food, does not all the Sun’s light intermingle with our own? We see that planting and weeding, building a community around sustainable agriculture, is not merely hard work, not merely peace work, no matter what our political beliefs or ideas.2 Or we can experience this labor as spirit-crushing, unrelenting drudgery. The challenge is ours to make of it what we will.”

Courts committed to sharing his knowledge, with her while she was an intern at Roxbury. In Katy’s words, “I became increasingly aware what a big burden this was for Jean-Paul, every week teaching two interns the same information just for me...I feel very fortunate! After two years, I was able to go out and start my own business, which has been successful. But it was draining for him.” To lighten the load, they began visiting other farms in the area. In the winter of 1995, these farms met and agreed to exchange farm visits to provide all of their interns with a broader exposure to the variety of farming techniques and designs even among organic and biodynamic farms. Sam Smith, one of the founding farmers, writes that a second, but equally compelling purpose has been “to enable the apprentices to experience the importance and power of forming close associations and a supportive community among peers.”3

The following pages present an organizational section, a record of general gatherings for introductions and evaluation. From all reports, CRAFT has been a great success in enriching the learning experience of the interns while strengthening the sense of community for both them and the farmers. One of Sam’s intern’s observations, “It has been reassuring to discover that my farmers, Sam and Elizabeth, are part of a much larger circle of farmers sowing, cultivating and sharing their beliefs. Over the five years of the On-Farm Mentoring project at NESFI, we asked ourselves repeatedly what would be the direct way to improve the skills of mentors and ensure that would-be farmers get the training and support they need to enter farming. The guides to assessing one’s readiness and to mentoring emerged from these discussions. We also concluded that we needed an official mentoring association that could provide the framework for farmers to develop curricula, and establish professional standards for farmer mentors, in the model of the biodynamic training programs in Germany and England. In January 2006 a group of experienced mentors and others convened to launch the association, ratify by-laws, and select a steering committee.

We can experience farm labor as an ecstasy of movement with the seasons, as the farmer, member of the Genesee Valley Organic CSA, wrote, “When we dig our hands into the brown, damp soil, does not the entire Earth tremble? When we plant seeds and eat green, living food, does not all the Sun’s light intermingle with our own? We see that planting and weeding, building a community around sustainable agriculture, is not merely hard work, not merely peace work, no matter what our political beliefs or ideas.2 Or we can experience this labor as spirit-crushing, unrelenting drudgery. The challenge is ours to make of it what we will.”

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Balancing Labor and Mechanization at Old Maids Farm

by Jack Kittredge

The rural parts of central Connecticut are like much of the Northeast – if within a ‘reasonable commute’ to an urban area but still relatively undeveloped, they are attractive to upscale buyers. This prices rural uses – such as farming – out of the picture in most cases. As fate would have it, much of the best farming land in New England lies in the Connecticut River valley and history has brought urban development to that same area because of the river’s usefulness in providing easy transportation and early water power.

In South Glastonbury, Connecticut, less than 20 miles from the state capitol in Hartford, this conflict is readily apparent. Old broadleaf tobacco farms still have plantings that reach within yards of the doors of new McMansion homes. Marinas along the river are full of powerboats. The “tractor vs. SUV” contest is well posed, and there is no doubt about who is winning.

“There used to be a lot of shade tobacco around,” says George Purtill, local resident who worked these fields as a teenager. “There is just broadleaf left now. Broadleaf is used for cigar filler and binder. Shade is the fine stuff used for the wrapper. Cigar demand is not what it was – it went up in the roaring 80s and 90s, and has dropped off quite a bit since then.”

Purtill’s father was an engineer in World War II who went on to build houses. George used to work for his father’s best friend – the biggest dairy and tobacco farmer in town – all through high school. When he graduated in 1970 he went off to the college of William and Mary, got a degree in accounting, and worked as a CPA. He could never quite kick the farming habit, however, and once stopped accounting for a year to work for a tobacco farmer in town who still used horses – the last one in Connecticut. Eventually Purtill got accepted to U/Conn in a joint MBA/law program and got his law degree in 1984. He is now a trial attorney and is married with two children. He is also one of the larger organic farmers in Connecticut.

“My dad had given me a piece of property in 1978”, he explains, “and I grew stuff on that through law school. Then I started doing more. I bought another piece of property and started growing a bunch of stuff, and bought more land and grew more. It was fairly inexpensive land because it was all river flood land – you couldn’t build on it. It was a lot of acres but only worth a few thousand dollars an acre.”

But George had a problem. He was running the farming operation part-time out of his house, and he lived in a residential area. It wasn’t good form to have tractors and implements all over the yard, so he was leaving things in the fields, out in the open. That’s not a good way to treat expensive equipment.

Then, in 1999, a farm on Old Maids Lane became available. It had a large tobacco barn built in the early 19th century, plus a number of other sheds and buildings. It stopped being a tobacco farm in the early 70s, then it became a nursery operation, and finally a gravel operation that stripped off a lot of the land. Altogether there were 22 acres along with the buildings. The trouble was, this was developable land, bordered by the Connecticut River, in the center of McMansion country.

“It is very expensive land”, Purtill agrees. “We had to pay a pretty good price to get it. I just needed the buildings and at first I wanted to get the barns and only 5 acres – enough for a legal farm in Connecticut. But it’s a good investment.”

The 22 acre is now the main farm. It is sandy loam, whereas the rest of George’s land is river bottomland, heavy clay soil.

“Here you put a drop of water on”, he sighs, “and it is 12 feet down in about 3 seconds. There a drop of water will stay on the surface. You never have to irrigate down there. Here you have to irrigate everything. We run drip to everything. We only have a well and use a big irrigation tank as a buffer.”

Altogether Purtill farms 86 certified organic acres between the Old Maids Lane place in South Glastonbury and various pieces in Portland and East Hartford. He doesn’t grow on all that in one year, of course, but rotate it in and out of production.

Growing a mix of vegetables to satisfy his CSA, Purtill admits there are things he does not grow well. “Like broccoli”, he says. “It’s hard for me to
grow it — if I grow 100 plants they all come ready the same time and I have 100 heads. One day it’s not ready, the next it is, and the third day it’s going to flower. I don’t do a good job with that.”

What he does well at, however, is tomatoes. He has 12,000 plants in the ground, and raises them all — heirloom, standard, and a few variegated cherrys. What he doesn’t sell will go into his own tomato sauce or salsa, which he bottles and sells at his farmstand.

He sells a lot of produce to Whole Foods and other retailers, making deliveries 3 or 4 times a week. He is also a major supplier of Yale University’s Berkeley College Dining Hall when they come into season. In addition he runs a 106 member CSA two days a week, as well as marketing at the self-service farm stand on Old Main Lane, and on a regular vegetable stand several miles away at a place where George worked as a kid from age 8 to age 18.

“We don’t do any farmers markets”, he says. “We have in the past, but they weren’t very successful. I think we weren’t in very good ones. I could expand the CSA — I turned away about 40 people for this year. But I don’t want to become dependent on just one market. And there is a lot of administration in a CSA. A lot of people on people work. We do all the administration. Three or four members come in and help with each distribution — make bunches, pack clamshells. We don’t bag for people — they go around and pick up the items and bag them themselves. It’s all laid out for them in the barn. There is a two and a half hour pick-up window: four to six thirty. We refrigerate it during the day, but once it is laid out there is no refrigeration.”

Besides the vegetables, Partill sells eggs from a laying flock of about 150 hens, and meat chickens twice a year when he slaughters batches of 100. For their feed George raises about 12 acres of organic corn, lets it dry in the field, and a friend combines in December or January. Some feed is direct, and some they ship to their feed supplier, Lightning Tree in upstate New York, which cracks it for them. The birds free range within an electric poultry net fence that seems to protect them from the coyotes, which are a problem for many local farmers.

He also makes quite a bit of screened compost from chicken manure, horse manure, turkey manure, grass clippings, weeds, leaves, hay, straw, vegetables, and vegetable slurry from the slurry bank.

“Right now on that pad are 4 windrows, and probably 4000 cubic yards of compost”, he says. “After screening it will net down to 3000. We rent equipment to do that. There is a guy who comes in with a big windrow digger with a lot of horsepower who does a good job. He works for various municipalities that do this.”

The compost sells for $40 a yard, but George also uses a lot on the farm. “When we took it over”, he says, “we had almost 4000 cubic yards of compost on the property. We got rid of it all.”

As much as possible, George uses tractors and farm machinery to keep his labordown. He owns four tractors, various weeder, seeders, transplanters, and a spray rig. Most crops are set up on 3-foot and 6-foot distances. Tomatoes are about 10 to 12 feet in a bed with a bit of windrow digger with a lot of horsepower who does a good job. He works for various municipalities that do this.

The compost sells for $40 a yard, but George also uses a lot on the farm. “When we took it over”, he says, “we had almost 4000 cubic yards of compost on the property. We got rid of it all.”

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with big trailers and hydraulic conveyers for our winter squash and pumpkin harvest. We call it a California operation, with guys in the trailers who are sorting, grading and repacking it into bins.

“We start a lot of our seedlings in our own greenhouse”, he continues, “and buy in more. We have a waterwheel transplanter for putting them in. We’ve been sharing equipment with another organic farm, but that hasn’t worked out too well and we get stuff in late. So we’re buying more of our own. I do a lot of the routine maintenance myself, but use my John Deere dealer for everything else. We have a combine we use when we raise soybeans and winter wheat. We raised soybeans for the tofu market, and do winter wheat as a cover crop.”

Although Purtill tries to do as much with machines as possible, he still needs labor. He has been happy hiring a mix of Mexicans and local athletes. The Mexicans come from April through October. Although he has had several Mexicans working on the farm in past years, this year he has only one.

“His name is Gerardo and that’s as far as we are going with it!” he laughs. “He’s been here four or five years, and worked for someone else here before that. When he is home he has his own farm. He grows corn, beans, avocados and peanuts there.

“The guys who have worked with me are good guys”, he continues. “You can trust them. You could leave your wallet on the table and it would be in the same place two days later.”

George has had no experience with migrants from other places, like Jamaica. He pays Mexican help the same range as the kids, starting at $7.75 and going to $10.00 an hour.

“Guys who have drivers’ licenses and can drive tractors get a bit more”, he admits. “Guys who are new on the block start at the bottom. I doubt that many farms pay more than $10 an hour, unless the person is a good equipment operator. One of those is worth a lot of money. You don’t want to send just anybody out on a $70,000 tractor!”

Purtill pays by check and says all his workers have papers, Social Security numbers, everything required.

“I go to farm labor training and we’re taught what papers to look for. But we’re not taught to be farm labor paper examiners. We just photocopy the papers and cards so they are on file. You can’t discriminate against guys from Mexico. If you require a form from a guy from Mexico, your high school kids have to do the same form. We do I9s for everyone, W4s for everyone. I9 is the immigration form that says you’ve looked at their cards.

“There are guys who have good papers”, he continues. “But the guys that have legitimate papers have had them for quite a while. They got them when they applied for them a long time ago. The guys who don’t have legitimate papers may have bought them yesterday. It’s harder to get them now. You are required to make the presumption that if the paper looks good that it is good. But I would say that for the guys who are in the Northeast, at least 50% of them have papers that are no good. If the IRS doesn’t have a match for someone you report as an employee they send you a notice. If we get that, we never hire them again.”

George says he is happy with the labor mix he has. The high school and college kids like working with the guys from Mexico, and vice versa. Most kids nowadays have all had Spanish from first grade on up, so even if they don’t admit it, they know a lot of Spanish. Purtill himself did not study Spanish and has just picked it up.

As for the high school and college kids he hires, George likes to pick athletes.

“They are used to doing physical stuff and taking orders”, he explains. “All these kids are lacrosse players. I hire them because they’re in shape and they’re used to working as a team. We buck the prevailing wisdom that suburban kids don’t want to work on farms. That’s a fallacy. They just don’t know how to work on farms. A lot of them are afraid to ask. There aren’t that many farms around and they don’t have any exposure to it.”

The area where Purtill’s main farm is located is transitioning from tobacco farms to up-scale homes. The Connecticut River is less than a mile away, and a marina there has many pleasure craft in slips.
The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2007-08

Right now in mid-August he has 4 high school/college kids sorting and packing and grading tomatoes. One of his college kids already went back to school.

"Yesterday was his last day", he sighed. "That becomes a little bit of a problem for us. As our tomato crop starts to come in, they start to drop off. My high school kids will be here a little longer, until football starts up. Then we get extra people who worked on the tobacco harvest. That will be done in two weeks and they will transition to here. Those are both migrants and people who live here year round."

One of the kids Purtill hires is his son, Henry, who is going off to college next week.

"That’s tough because he’s my best big equipment operator", George says. "He’s going off to Wake Forest in North Carolina for his freshman year. We don’t even get to have him on weekends! He was here in the spring and planted almost all of our tomatoes and peppers. He ran the machine and we had Gerardo and a college kid who was home early on the back.”

Purtill has managed to cut down on labor a lot by mechanizing. He says his labor dollars were less last year than the year before, and he grew more. This year he cut labor even more by buying a mechanical weeder, even though he still has to hand hoe behind it.

“An organic farm just has a lot of manual labor”, he says. “Weed control is our biggest thing. Some of the spraying we do we use a backpack sprayer – that is a one-on-one operation. We spray a pyrethrum product for cucumber beetles and squash bugs. We also use Bt, and a copper spray for our heirloom tomatoes – which aren’t blight resistant. We just bought a sprayer that will go on our ATV because we just couldn’t get it on fast enough with a backpack.”

George admits he is often on a soapbox about farm labor.

“It’s crazy, our laws and our rules”, he says. “We can import all kinds of products from Mexico, but the guys who work on them over there can’t come and work on them over here! It’s a system that is hurting farmers – the lack of the ability to have guys come in and work with proper permits and paperwork. It hurts the big farms somewhat, but they’ve figured out ways around it by using labor contractors. They just pay a company and the labor contractor provides some workers so the farmer can maintain a wall of deniability. They can say they just hired ABC Contractor Company to harvest their thousand acres of walnuts. Who it really hurts is small farms, and proportionally it hurts organic farms more – we need more hand labor! We’re pulling weeds, we’re hoeing – even when we’re using our mechanical weeding machines to cut down on labor.

“To me it hurts the small organic farmers who need to hire workers to do that stuff”, he continues. "The Mexican guys whom I have known through the years farm organically at home. They are ideally trained to do the kind of work that we have. They save seeds at home, hand weed and hoe at home, they hand harvest a lot of stuff. These guys are not dumb ‘wetbacks’ – the horrible stereotype that people have of people from Mexico. These guys are skilled farmers. I know a guy who planted his corn before he left, and went back home to harvest it. He had 5 or 6 beef cattle and his own little farm. They’re skilled farmers, not dopes.

“How do they get here? By going across the border by hook or by crook. That’s what they do. They pay a coyote to get them across at whatever border crossing is popular at the time. We pay tax dollars to try to prevent that! It’s bad for small farmers to not have that labor pool.”

Henry loads his father’s truck for the delivery run to stores and Whole Foods in West Hartford.
Good businesspeople have several traits in common. As employers, they tend to be even-handed and well organized. They are excellent supervisors, teach their employees while giving work directions, and motivate their employees to do an ever more competent job. They also keep up with the administrative tasks associated with being a business manager and they make sure that their businesses are in compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and codes. But none of us is born knowing how to do all this and some people prefer to hand on aspects of their business responsibility. No matter what tasks you do yourself or delegate to others, your farm business always deserves the highest possible quality of administrative care.

Chances are that you already shoulder many administrative responsibilities as an owner-operator or manager of your farm. But once you take on trainees, you take on another role—that of agricultural employer. This can come as a surprise to people who think of themselves as on-farm mentors who offer education in exchange for labor. Many farmers have operated under this misunderstanding for years. However, if you train your workers to do any work that benefits your farm business, you are employees in the eyes of government. This determination is made on the basis of what they do—not on what you call them. Your choice of job title—in tern, apprentice, journeyperson, willing worker, or otherwise—has no bearing on the law. When your trainees are in a class room under your instruction, it’s fair to consider them trainees, not hourly wage earners. But the minute someone begins to perform work that contributes to your farm’s bottom line, he or she goes back on the clock as your employee.

Judith Gillian, one of the founders of NFESIL, likes this to training cashiers at a retail store, “New employees get their training on a dummy cash register in a back room and aren’t considered employees during that time. But as soon as they touch a cash register in the front of the store, they go on the clock as employees.”

Trainees in a classroom aren’t considered employees, but the minute they pluck so much as a bean from a plant or carry a bucket of water to the chickens, they are.

Your Responsibilities as an Employer
By law, employers have certain responsibilities to their employees. And many also to state and federal governments. Unless you are exempt from particular laws, as discussed below, your responsibilities as an employer mean that you must:
- Keep detailed personnel records for each employee.
- Pay employees at the federal minimum wage and the state agricultural minimum wage rate.
- Withhold federal and, when applicable, state income taxes from employees’ pay.
- Withhold Social Security and Medicare payments from your employees’ pay and match them with the employer’s share.
- Pay state unemployment taxes.
- Detail all amounts withheld from employees’ pay.
- Submit payment of these monies to the appropriate agencies, along with the proper forms.
- Pay overtime to any employee who performs any non-agricultural labor during the week.
- Pay state Workers’ Compensation Insurance.
- Comply with all pertinent state and federal requirements of any state or federal law.

The first thing that most new employers tend to ask is: “What do I have to do?” That decision isn’t always up to the injured person. However, you should be aware that some people assume that their trainees would never consider such a decision isn’t always up to the injured person. Even if you discover that it’s not compulsory in your state, there are compelling reasons to carry it.

Some people assume that their trainees wouldn’t need sue for damages. However, a worker may have to sue for damages above and beyond those costs.

Note, too, that this is an area that is now receiving increased governmental attention. In 2004, a number of Hmong farmers in California were fined because they did not provide Workers’ Compensation Insurance for extended family members who were helping out on their farms. The fines ranged from $14,500 to $25,000—a cost well beyond that of the insurance. These farmers, all immigrants, were not aware that their extended family members should have workers compensation. So even if you don’t think you need to carry Workers’ Compensation, you might want to consider doing so.

Premiums. The first thing that most new employers want to know about Workers’ Compensation Insurance is how much they will have to pay to insure their workers. The answer varies depending on what the employers do, the location of the job, and the accident records of the occupation in general as well as that of the specific employer.
Private insurance companies provide Workers’ Compensation Insurance and must structure the premium costs so that they make a profit on the business. In most states, these companies are free to charge whatever they wish; competition between them serves to keep premiums as low as is practical. The only way to determine what your premiums will be is to call several insurance companies to inquire.

Five states in the Northeast region do set premium rates. The rates for these states in 2004 are listed in the chart titled, “Sample Premiums for Workers’ Compensation Insurance,” on the following page. As you can see from this chart, there are a number of listed categories, or classifications. These classifications each have a code that is used by the insurance industry as a matter of convenience. And because occupations such as farming include so many types of jobs, farm employees tend to fall under classifications such as “Nursery,” “Market Garden,” “Dairy,” or “Field Crops.”

The dollar amounts listed in the “Sample Premiums for Workers’ Compensation Insurance” chart refer to dollars per $100.00 of payroll. For example, if a dairy farmer in New Jersey were paying $4,000 in payroll, she would have to pay forty times the premium rate of $6.84, or $273.60, to insure a worker classified as “Dairy.” If she had an employee who operated farm machinery but did not work in the dairy, he would fall under the farm machinery operation classification and she would pay a different rate to insure him.

In cases where there is no listing for a particular classification in a state, your insurance agent can inform you about the premium.
performed “incident to or in conjunction with” primary agricultural tasks. For example, during the hours a worker prep and packs produce for the farmer’s market, he or she is considered an agricultural worker, but the time spent selling the goods can not be counted as agricultural work.

Keeping track of agricultural vs. non-agricultural hours for each of your employees is important because it determines both the rate and the hours for which you pay them. If someone does even an hour of non-agricultural work in a given week, he or she is not considered an agricultural worker for that entire week. That means that you must pay this employee at the federal minimum wage—not the state agricultural minimum wage—for the entire week, even if you live in an area where the state agricultural minimum wage supersedes the federal minimum wage.

The definition of the type of work an employee performs in a given week also affects overtime pay. Farmers do not have to pay overtime for agricultural work performed beyond the basic 40-hour workweek. However, they do have to pay overtime for non-agricultural work. If your employees perform non-agricultural work for any time in a given week, you must pay them overtime for any hours they work above forty in that week. “Are your Employees Performing Agricultural Work?” (Worksheet #12, included in Section IV) gives a more complete overview of this issue and includes a check list that will help you determine whether and when your workers are agricultural.

Strategic Thinking
When one farmer learned about these laws, his immediate response was to reassign tasks. “Right,” he said, “I guess I better go back to doing Farmer’s Market. I’ll take my kids over to the farm and have the apprentices here to do “agricultural” work while I’m gone. Otherwise, I’ll end up having to pay federal minimum wage along with overtime.

FLSA and the 50-Man Day Exemption
The 50-Man Day Exemption provided under FLSA applies to many small farmers in the Northeast. This is good news. It exempts smaller farms from many burdensome and reporting requirements and provides some relief in the areas of farm worker transportation and housing, as discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 2.3, respectively. It also exempts qualifying farms from most provisions of the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Protection Act (MSPA) discussed below. To qualify for this important exemption, you must be able to prove that you have not hired agricultural help for 50 Man Days or more. Even if you own or control, no matter what their corporate identity, for more than 50 man-days during any calendar quarter during the preceding calendar year.

For the purposes of this Act, a man-day is defined as “any day during which an employee performs agricultural labor for not less than 1 hour.” You do not need to count work performed by immediate family members, for wages or not, but you must count work performed by other people on all the farm enterprises that you own or manage. For the purposes of easy calculation, five hundred man-days is approximately the equivalent of seven employees employed full-time in a calendar quarter. Qualifying for this exemption requires careful documentation and management of your labor resources. For example, a farmer who hires temporary or part-time employees during part of the year, such as the harvesting season, may exceed the 50 man-day test even though he or she has only two or three full-time employees. Similarly, if a farmer hires an independent contractor to manage his harvest but still has “the power to direct, control, or supervise the work, or to determine the pay rates or method of payment for the harvest hands,” he must count the contractor’s employees in calculating his man-days. “The 500-Day Exemption” (Worksheet #13, included in Section IV) shows a sample compilation and includes a template you can use to track employee hours.

**FLSA, Minimum Wage, and Overtime**
As noted above, FLSA exempts some employees from both its overtime and minimum wage provisions and certain other employees only from provisions relating to harvest labor. Farm workers employed on small farms that qualify for the FLSA 500 Man-Day Exemption are exempt from both provisions. Farm workers on larger operations are exempt from overtime requirements alone.

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* $7.15 after 1/06  ** $7.15 after 1/07

Splitting Hairs
Let’s suppose, for example, that you have about an hour and a half of watering to be done on a particular day, but no other work. If one employee waters, that day will be counted as a man-day. However, if you split the job between two people, each of whom works for 1.5 hours, the day will not be counted as a man-day.

FLSA Recordkeeping Requirements
The FLSA requires you to keep certain records for all employees unless you are exempt from paying them federal minimum wage and overtime. If there is any doubt about their status—for example, if they have ever gone to the farmer’s market, tended the farm stand, or helped create a value-added product—it’s important to keep these records as a routine part of your administrative work. It could also be successfully argued that keeping these records is a good business practice and well worth doing for that reason alone. Review “FLSA Recordkeeping Requirements” (Worksheet #15, included in Section IV) for a check list of required records.

1. Personal information, including employee’s name, home address, occupation, sex, and birthday if under 19 years of age

Counting Beans, Beds, and Lessons
If you simply cannot afford to pay your trainees the required minimum wage, consider taking this easy, effective way around the problem. You can pay them what you are supposed to pay, but also charge a certain amount for teaching and/or room and board. This exchange makes it possible to comply with the law and still afford to host trainees. Rates for room and board must be representative of local prices and are regulated by MSAWPA, but rates for training and education are flexible.

As an example, imagine that a farmer in New Jersey is paying a farmworker $206.00 a week, or $5.15 an hour, as required by the state minimum wage law, and charging this same person $50.00 a week for a room and $40.00 a week for meals. If the farmer’s goal is to pay the trainee $50.00 a week, he can charge $10.00 an hour for teaching time and schedule 6.66 hours of lecture and 6.66 hours of hands-on balance. Alternatively, the farmer can charge $30.00 an hour for teaching and nothing for room and board. As long as the instruction time is a little over five hours a week, the trainee will still end up with $50.00 a week, after paying for the training, and the farmer will be acting within the law.

Remember that you must count rent and any money you make from teaching as a part of your own taxable income. And even if you are exempt from MSAWPA regulations, both you and your trainees will benefit if you clearly state how you will handle the question of wages and charges when you interview. Regard this as part of your potential trainees’ education; more than likely, they know little or nothing about agricultural labor law.
by establishing employment standards related to wages, housing, transportation, disclosure, and recordkeeping. Many on-farm mentors are astonished to discover that the provisions of this Act apply only to those who are 12 or younger; they never imagined that the terms "migrant" and "seasonal" applied to their "willing workers" and "interns."

Workers Defined
As defined by the MSAWPA, "a seasonal agricultural worker is employed in agricultural employment of a seasonal or other temporary nature and is not required to be absent overnight from his [or her] permanent place of residence..." A "migrant agricultural worker" is employed in agricultural employment of a seasonal or other temporary nature and is required to be absent overnight from his [or her] permanent place of residence."

Because of this Act, most trainees are classified as either seasonal or migrant workers, and you, as their employer, are subject to its provisions—unless you can document that you qualify for the 500 Man-Day Exemption discussed above. This is another example of why careful recordkeeping can be worth its weight in gold.

However, even though MSAWPA housing regulations do not apply to farmers who qualify for the FLSA 500 Man-Day Exemption, the nearly identical OSHA regulations for farmworker housing, noted in Chapter 2.2, apply. (Also, see OSHA Housing Regulations, Worksheet #9, included in Section IV.) In terms of housing standards, the exemption makes little practical difference.

Exemption from MSAWPA provisions does give qualifying farms relief in the area of wages and reporting. However, many small farmers make an effort to comply with these regulations because they protect both the employer and the employee. MSAWPA provisions include:

- Paying a minimum wage and allowing deductions on pay slips.
- Keeping accurate payroll records for each employee for a period of three years, including the basis on which the wages were paid, the number of piecework units earned, the number of hours worked, the total pay for each pay period, the amounts and reasons for any deductions, and net pay.
- Displaying a MSAWPA poster in a conspicuous place. This poster sets forth the rights and protections that MSAWPA gives to covered workers.
- Giving job applicants a written statement of the terms of employment in their own language, including "the place of employment, the period of employment, wage rate(s), crops and activities, whether transportation and other benefits are provided, housing and its cost (if provided), ...and information about any employer charges for goods or services."
- Giving your employees written information about whether Workers' Compensation Insurance is provided and if so, the names of the insurance carrier and its policyholder, the name and telephone number of the person who must be notified of an injury or death, and the time period within which this notice must be given.
- Complying with all transportation safety equipment requirements and providing a minimum level of financial security such as through a vehicle liability insurance program, appropriate Workers' Compensation coverage, and/or by posting a liability bond.

If you do not qualify for the 500 Man-Day Exemption, consult Worksheet #17 in Section IV for a check list of the MSAWPA regulations that could apply to you. Pay particular attention to the liability issues that are explained in Section III. You can find additional information about the MSAWPA at the USDA Office of Chief Economist, Agricultural Labor Affairs website: http://www.usda.gov/oc/ece/labor-affairs/MSAWPAsum.htm.

In short, DOL does not collect any

A Note about DOL, FLSA, and Confidentiality
Many farmers are reluctant to ask the federal DOL for help, fearing that a call or e-mail could trigger an investigation. Compliance assistance inquiries are required to maintain agency staff handling and responding to compliance assistance inquiries will be kept from DOL agency staff may have about becoming active Compliance Assistance (CA) service. Their mail could trigger an investigation. Compliance for compliance assistance for fear that a call or e-mail would be passed in Chapter 2.3. Under two conditions: the DOL must not categorize the work they are doing as "hazardous," and the work must take place only during non-school hours. The same rule applies to 12- and 13-year-old children with one added proviso: you must also have the written consent of the child’s parent or guardian, or their parent or guardian must be employed on your farm. If you hire children under 12 years old, all of the above requirements apply, but in addition, you can only hire them if all of the employees on your farm are under 12. Farmers must maintain a minimum wage regulation. Use “The FLSA Child Labor Exemption” (Worksheet #16, included in Section IV) to make certain your employment practices are not considered oppressive. You can find a typical example of the current state “Child Labor Laws Applicable to Agricultural Employment” at www.dol.gov/esa/programs/. In addition to the FLSA child labor requirements, you may be subject to state laws that govern child labor. The U.S. Department of Labor is the best resource for this information. Look for the “Table of State Child Labor Laws for Agricultural Employment, on their website at: http://www.dol.gov/esa/programs/wd/state/argiemp2.htm.

In Section II.1, the DOL as a federal agency is legally authorized to investigate violations of the federal regulations that it enforces. The DOL may issue a Compliance Assistance (CA) Notice to an employer to determine whether or not you qualify for OSHA’s agricultural exemption and if not, whether you are in compliance with its other requirements.

In the housing standards discussed in Chapter 2.3, OSHA requires that: "Your workers who have easy access to potable drinking water, toilet facilities, and hand-washing stations, along with training in hygiene. You educate your workers about all hazardous chemicals, with the exception of pesticides, to which they may be exposed and keep a written "hazard communication program" on file that describes this training. You inform any workers who may be exposed to cadmium, which is contained in some fertilizers and pesticides and which can also be released when welding or soldering metals, about the risks and provide them with protective gear. If your farm includes a logging operation, you provide training in hazards, work practices, first aid, and CPR and also provide appropriate equipment for all parts of the operation. You post information about OSHA protections and obligations, and all workers have access to OSHA designees, including the records of all injuries and occupational illnesses, and notify the nearest OSHA office in the event of a workplace fatality or any accident that causes three or more days of work to be lost.

If you are not close to a hospital or clinic, you have a trained first-aid provider and first-aid supplies on your farm. If any farm operators are exposed to chemicals in the workplace.

In The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Protection Act (MSAWPA)
The MSAWPA is also administered by DOL through its wage-hour division. It protects “migrant” and “seasonal” agricultural workers from exploitation.

The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Protection Act (MSAWPA)
The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSHA) is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration within the Department of Labor as well as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) within the Department of Health and Human Resources. The Act is intended to assure sufficient protection and safety and health to U.S. workers. As a general rule, every employer must comply with OSHA. However, there are exemptions for agricultural employers that very well might apply to your situation. Your immediate family members are not considered employees under OSHA and are therefore excluded from OSHA coverage. In order to be a seasonal or other "temporary labor camp," you must also have the written consent of the child’s parent or guardian, or their parent or guardian must be employed on your farm. If you hire children under 12 years old, all of the above requirements apply, but in addition, you can only hire them if all of the employees on your farm are under 12. Farmers must maintain records of employees who work for more than 15 hours per week. Information is stored and used in accordance with OSHA regulations...

You must also comply with numerous regulations regarding the safety and maintenance of farm equipment. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the OSHA partner for the federal agency that is responsible for research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-
related injury and illness. NIOSH staff members are educators, not regulators, and have designated the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH), in Cooperstown, NY, as one of nine regional agricultural centers responsible for conducting education and outreach on farm safety. NYCAMH is an excellent source of farm safety information, safety-related training, and the personal protective devices required by OSHA. Visit their website at www.nycamh.com.

Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, andRodenticide Act (FIFRA)

FIFRA is a federal statute that governs various aspects of pesticide registration and use. The FIFRA provision that is most applicable to agriculture, and particularly to on-farm mentors, is the Worker Protection Standard (WPS).

The WPS is designed to protect workers from pesticide exposure. It applies to two types of employees: general agricultural workers and pesticide handlers who mix, load or apply agricultural pesticides, clean or repair pesticide application equipment, or assist in any way with applying pesticides. If you use pesticides on your crops, even those that are botanically derived and/or approved for use in organic production, you must comply with certain parts of the WPS, including training your employees in safe pesticide handling and application and providing them with protective gear. Exemptions from the WPS generally have to do with mosquito control, post-harvest applications and livestock management. In most cases, state departments of agriculture are responsible for enforcing the WPS, although it is a federal Act.


Federal Laws that Assure "Fair Employment"

A number of federal laws assure equal employment opportunities to qualified workers. As a standard workplace poster declares, "Equal Employment Opportunity is the Law!" Although these laws provide exemptions for small businesses, most farmers are in favor of them and comply by preference.

- The Equal Pay Act of 1963, as amended, prohibits sex discrimination in payment of wages to women and men performing essentially the same work in the same establishment. However, there are five exemptions for agricultural employers—the same ones that apply to FLSA minimum wage requirements, discussed above.

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, prohibits discrimination in hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, fringe benefits, job training and other aspects of employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. However, if you employ fourteen or fewer people for less than each working day in twenty or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year, you are exempt.

- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended, protects employees forty years of age and older from discrimination on the basis of age in hiring, promotion, discharge, compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment. If you have employed fewer than twenty workers for each working day for twenty or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year you are exempt.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any qualified person with disabilities in hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, job training, fringe benefits and other aspects of employment. If you have employed less than fifteen workers for each working day in 20 or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year you are exempt.

In most states, "fair employment" laws have similar requirements to the federal acts that cover equal employment opportunities. Check with your state Department of Labor to learn what they entail.

Additional Legal Requirements

A few other laws affect you in your role as an employer. Complying with them is straightforward and takes very little time. Ignoring them could be costly, so it's wise to learn how to comply with them and make doing so routine.

- The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) is easy to comply with for most small farmers in the Northeast. It simply asks you to verify that your employees are legally allowed to work in the U.S. (see Personnel Records, pages 90 and 100) and prohibits employers from discriminating against immigrants. For the purposes of the law, an employee is any individual who is compensated for services to an employer. The compensation can be monetary or in the form of goods and services such as lodging or food.

Farmers are likely to be familiar with Section H-2A of this Act. It authorizes and regulates the lawful admission of temporary, nonimmigrant workers, H-2A workers, to perform agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature when U.S. workers cannot be recruited to fill the jobs.

- The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) affects very few small farmers in the Northeast, but it does apply to larger farms. It allows employees who work for an employer who had 50 or more employees in 20 or more workweeks of the current or preceding year to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave during any twelve-month period for certain family-related or medical reasons such as caring for a member of the family or after the adoption of a child.

- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, better

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known as the “Welfare Reform Law,” was designed to promote personal responsibility. The Act includes many provisions, but only one affects you: the New Hire Reporting Program. This program requires states to gather and process information about newly hired people so that if they owe child support, their payments can be enforced. (See Personnel Records, page 91.)

Employment Tax Laws

Agricultural employers must comply with two major employment tax laws: the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), or as it’s usually known, Social Security, and the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA). The requirements for each of these laws are extensive. However, they do contain a variety of exemptions that can benefit smaller farms. In brief, the very smallest farmers gain an exemption from paying the employer’s share of FICA. Employers who paid less than $150 in cash wages to any employee in a year or a total of less than $2,500 to all employees in a year are exempt. Additionally, farm employers do not have to withhold federal income tax from an employee who is exempt from FICA, for reasons cited above, and is also doing work that the IRS defines as “agricultural labor.”

If you paid $150 or more in cash wages to an employee or $2,500 or more in cash wages to all your employees, you probably have to pay FICA. However, there are some exceptions to these requirements that can apply to agricultural employers. Review the resources mentioned below to learn about FICA exemptions in detail.

FUTA is designed to provide unemployed workers with partial income during a short period of involuntary unemployment and is mostly funded through employer taxes. It provides small agricultural employers with important exemptions. First, non-cash compensation paid to agricultural laborers is exempt from the FUTA definition of wages—the definition of wages that is used to establish how much federal unemployment tax an employer owes. Secondly, farmers who pay laborers in cash must pay the FUTA tax only if they paid $20,000 or more total wages for agricultural labor in any quarter of the current or previous year or employed ten or more workers for some portion of a day in each of 20 different weeks during the current or preceding calendar year.

Clearly, a detailed description of these federal tax laws and their exemptions is beyond the scope of this manual. IRS Publication #51, The Agricultural Employer’s Tax Guide, and the previously referenced book by Jack Runyan, Summary of Federal Laws and Regulations Affecting Agricultural Employers, are both useful resources. As well, your state may have employment taxes with which you must comply. To be on the safe side, it’s wise to consult with a local tax preparer who is familiar with agricultural businesses.

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To place your order or receive additional information call or write:
As a host to trainees, you assume two separate but

Wearing Two Hats

consequence of these activities. You want to look into special policies that cover injury or teach equestrian classes and growers who may be injured to produce that will be eaten raw. Someone may try to sue in the belief that your product carries a liability insurance if you market animal products for sale. But even if you sell only wholesale, say to a certain amount in order to be a vendor at the farmer's market. Farmers who sell at a farmer's market, knowledge—most likely for recreational purposes or production to provide a benefit to you. For example, if you grant permission to your neighbors to walk on your property, they are invitees. You owe a higher duty of care to them than to trespassers, licensees, or invitees. If they are hurt determines whether or not your liability insurance will cover them. The following discussion is general in nature and reflects the law in most states, even if the particulars and terminology are somewhat different. But these classifications are creatures of state law, so it's important to determine whether your state modifies them in any way. You can research this by going to the website of the National Agricultural Law Center: http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/readingrooms/landownerliability/.

Trespassers. Trespassers are unininvited visitors and are generally on your property without your knowledge—most likely for recreational purposes such as hiking, hunting, or simply watching birds. As landowner, you owe the least duty of care to these people, to the point of none in some cases. However, there are exceptions. If you have knowledge of frequent trespassers, your duty of care may increase slightly. As well, you must warn trespassers by posting signs about any dangers that could cause serious injury or death, especially those they are unlikely to discover themselves. Most states have passed “recreational use” statutes that will protect you against the threat of lawsuits from recreational users. If they injure themselves while enjoying your hospitality without your invitation, you cannot be held financially responsible for their injuries—with two exceptions. You may not be protected in cases judged as “malicious conduct,” for example, having a dangerous footbridge or when minor children hurt themselves on an “attractive nuisance” such as an unattended tractor parked on a hill.

You owe trespassing children a greater duty of care because they lack mature judgment and are not usually able to appreciate risks. The attractive nuisance doctrine requires that you take reasonable measures to protect them from injury if you have created or maintain an artificial condition in an area where it could lure them into danger. Natural features such as ponds do not usually raise the standard of care. Approaches such as swings or docks may be judged to be attractive nuisances. Impress on your trainees that they have a responsibility to make sure that their activities on your farm never result in a situation that could be considered a dangerous condition or an attractive nuisance. For example, putting equipment away after a job is finished should be routine.

Licensees. Licensees are people who are on your property with your permission. As such, they are considered a dangerous condition or an attractive nuisance. For example, lettuce knives left scattered around the trail and into a posted area, for example, they become trespassers. Again, make sure your trainees are your partners in maintaining a safe environment. For example, lettuce knives left scattered around the farmstand area could quickly become a dangerous condition or an attractive nuisance.

Last but not least, be cautious about charging people a fee for the privilege of using your property. If you do so, you are likely to lose any protection that a recreational use statute might provide. Again, check your own state laws, because these statutes vary widely from state to state.

Tying it All Together

The legal and administrative requirements of on-farm mentoring can seem overwhelming when clustered together as in this guide. But once you put your mind to it, being in compliance really isn’t that hard to achieve and the rewards are immense—especially in terms of sheer peace of mind. Many of the regulations are sensible and promote health and safety. If you remember that you would want your family protected by the same sorts of standards required by these laws and regulations, complying with them no longer seems so inconvenient or burdensome.

If you are put off by lengthy discussions of regulatory issues, consider creating a personal collection of good reference material. For example, the previously referenced handbook by Jack Runyan is wonderful having any. You may also want to visit a website that gives a good overview of these requirements, such as: http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FarmLabor/laborlawreg/.

Finally, take the time to complete the worksheets on legal matters included in Section IV of this guide. By doing so, you may doubt that your farm would be found exempt from many regulations and also that you can develop templates and systems to simplify compliance with others. They are designed to help you navigate what could otherwise be a bewildering maze of legal requirements associated with the business end of your on-farm mentoring role.
Farm Labor: Working with Ex-offenders

by Julie Rawson

It is serendipitous that as I sit down to write this article about working with ex-offenders on our farm the 6 year-old daughter of one of our now full-time farm staff, Anamarie, is sitting next to me drawing pictures and spelling out “cook lunch” as I promised her that we would cook lunch together when I get done with this article.

Jack and I have been here on Many Hands Organic Farm since 1982. Our first set of laborers were our four children, who complained bitterly as they reached their teenage years, but who seem to be pretty happy with us as they now are in their late 20’s.

We added a mix of working shareholders and live-in apprentices in the late 80’s and then traded in the live-in apprentices for local teen and college labor around 1995 or so. Slowly our workforce has gotten more mature; most of our paid staff is part time and in their mid – twenties to early thirties. Our working shareholders come for 80 hours per season and range from early thirties to mid seventies. Our son Dan worked very closely with us as an adult for a few years as a co-manager, has since moved on to a better paying job, and still works some of our land for his own venture. I’ve learned to be adept at getting the occasional college group that stops by to help out with important and very labor intensive tasks like shelling mountains of peas, splitting a hundred pounds of garlic or planting and mulching it. Suffice it to say that all kinds of folks with all kinds of arrangements have worked on our farm.

For the past 10 or so years I have ended the season vowing to downscale. Every succeeding year I ramp it back up again, having committed to hiring one too many people or re-energized by the consistent consumer demand for our CSA, meat chickens or pork. 2007 was no different than the rest. We were pretty happy with us as they now are in their late 20’s.

Then the Worcester Living Magazine did an article on our farm that came out in February. Not only was it a whole array of new customers clamoring for our food, but we got a call from the executive director of Dismas House, a halfway house for ex-offenders who live at “Almost Home”, a 4 month residential drug related records. Dave asked if the guys of Dismas House, a halfway house for ex-offenders with drug related records. Dave asked if the guys of Dismas House, a halfway house for ex-offenders and range from early thirties to mid seventies. Our workforce has progressed and various guys found their various niches on the farm, we got more work done, had more fun and all of us found ourselves looking forward to Fridays. On our end Kathy, Jack, Becca and I would each take a small crew and work closely with them through the morning.

The first day was phenomenal. Meredith, the director of Almost Home, checked in halfway through the morning to tell me that she hadn’t seen the guys so happy in days, and getting along better with each other than they did at home. I don’t think of myself as terribly religious, but when Robert, one of the guys said we had to form a circle, hold hands and give a prayer before we ate our shared meal tears came to my eyes and I was hooked. As the spring progressed and various guys found their various niches on the farm, we got more work done, had more fun and all of us found ourselves looking forward to Fridays. On our end Kathy, Jack, Becca and I would each take a small crew and work closely with them through the morning.

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We started to get work done that we hadn’t gotten to in years – fences fixed and replaced, perennial patches of vegetables and fruits out from under grasses and bindweed and Bishop’s weed. There was always a crew on the wood pile (we burn about 15 cords per year). It became quickly clear that some of the guys had skills that were stronger than ours. Scott took on a project to redo our kitchen walls and ceiling. Edwin became our mechanic and no one could make garden beds with such precision as Brian. Angel was the mowing king, and Jeff took charge of a delicate tree removal job.

Brian and Edwin graduated from the program in May and June. Jack and Becca and I had a powwow and decided we wanted to offer them full time jobs on the farm. In order to do it we would have to ramp up production, sell more shares, and get our retail accounts back on line. When more piglets became available for purchase we upped them to 12.

We have never hired anyone full time on the farm as Jack and I work almost full time for NOFA, and have many other irons in the fire. It was a big step for us, and a huge responsibility to be the major employers for these two young men. And then what about winter when there was no work? What is our responsibility?

Without sharing too much information from someone’s private life, let’s say that there are a lot of pieces that a person who has been in jail 2 or 3 times has to put back together. In the best of all worlds there are likely huge fines for driving infractions, issues with child support, and lack of infrastructure like clothing, personal belongings, savings of any type, etc.

We have worked through these issues together, helping with loans that were paid back slowly out of payroll, lending the use of our truck to pick up furniture (Brian and Edwin have moved out of Worcester and live just 3 miles from the farm now), helping with nutrition counseling, hooking them up with other job opportunities with local farmers and friends, and providing moral support when the legal system seems particularly onerous because of past offenses.

What we have gained is the high quality work of two focused and motivated individuals who through their labor and intelligence have helped us improve our farming practices across the board, kept our machinery in fine working order, and the friendship of two very thoughtful and trusted people. Brian took over custody of our somewhat intimidating black lab who was scaring our CSA shareholders. Edwin has developed a special relationship with Becca.

What of winter and the future? We decided to take on an early winter CSA which started November 9. Brian and Edwin worked with Jack to build two new hoop houses to grow the food. That will help pay the bills a little later in the season. Brian has located part time work for the three months of December – February. Edwin will be doing some interior decorating for us and will line up some more temporary work for that time period.

What about the other guys? The first guys that came to us in April have all moved on. Some ended up back in jail, some are thriving on the outside. Many are doing alright, but are working at somewhat dead end jobs. It is really hard to get a decent job...
if you have a criminal record. Whenever I hear that someone faltered and used again, my heart sinks. Some part of me would like to be able to hire all the guys who show an interest in farming, but of course that isn’t possible – not yet. It will take time, but I hope to (possibly through NOFA/Mass, possibly through another non-profit group) put together a comprehensive program to help guys who want to farm as their next step find a place to do it, and find mentor farmers who are willing to help them phase back into society.

Jack and I hope to fine tune our relationship with Almost Home so that it can be the most productive for all of us. Recently, I tried to start dealing with the vegetable gap, as I call it. Many of the guys really enjoy working with the fruits and vegetables, but don’t know how to prepare them – nor do they prefer to eat them. They, like the rest of our population, are “surviving” with cheap calorie foods and have lost touch with real food. Even though we have been providing Almost Home with our CSA food each week, it hasn’t been consistently used by them or the staff.

Two weeks ago I invited Gretchen (on Almost Home staff) and one guy to help me cook lunch from our share that week. So far we have had great results. Gretchen came back all excited about the stir fries she has been making. Last week Jay took complete charge of the stir fry, making sure that it was cooked just enough to preserve all the wonderful flavors.

We have learned (as we learned long ago with all staff) that work gets done well when we work side by side with folks. Luckily we have now 6 of us – Brian, Edwin, Jack, Becca, Kathy, sometimes Dan, and I, to take a small number of guys under our wing while we are working. We have lost a few tools to wrong handling, as one does with any new staff member, but have gained hours of dedicated labor and 30 or more new friends over the course of the past 6 months.

I spend a lot of time checking in with guys about how they are feeling about the work. Kathy cajoles with great positivity (and an iron hand), Jack shares his knowledge as he works, and Brian and Edwin are eminently patient. Becca gets guys to work hard by her focused example. Sometimes the rain or the cold gets folks down, but we suffer through and usually have a great time of it regardless of the weather.

The other day I asked Todd how he was doing, and he summed it up. He said, “Friday is always a great day.”
Organic Farms and Immigration Policy

by Richard Mandelbaum, CATA

In recent years organic farms in the Northeast – large and small – are increasingly relying on immigrant workers. This mirrors a national trend. There are multiple reasons for this: Workers from Mexico and other parts of Latin America are often more used to and more willing to engage in the hard, physical labor involved in farm work, and also more willing to work for the wages being offered. In addition, many organic growers, usually men who have had to leave their families behind – are often hoping to earn as much money as is possible, in order to send it back home. As a result, farmworkers often want to work as many hours as they can, which is often not true of local residents looking for temporary work. Estimates vary but anywhere from 50% to up to 80% of the agricultural workforce has an undocumented immigration status.

As a result, organic farmers are increasingly realizing that U.S. immigration policy has a direct impact on their operations, as well as on the personal relationships they have formed with their workers. Immigration policy, in fact, shapes our food system as much as many provisions of the Farm Bill do, but has not received the same kind of political attention from the organic and sustainable agriculture community. Meanwhile, immigration has become a political football in Congress and the Presidential campaign. Anti-immigrant sentiment has skyrocketed – a far cry from 1987, when the Reagan Administration passed an amnesty for undocumented immigrants. Political fear mongering has spuriously manipulated the public debate over immigration into a supposed national security issue. With all the challenges facing the nation and the world, and amidst the deadlock in Washington, one of the few initiatives to move forward has been to begin building a wall between our country and a peaceful, friendly neighbor. The current enforcement can be more accurately seen as a Bush Administration attempt to (1) satisfy its political base at a time of increasing discontent, and (2) set the stage for an expansion of the H-2A guest worker program as a “solution” to the labor shortage. H-2A is the legal descendant of the bracero programs of the 1940’s, in which thousands of Mexican workers were brought into the U.S. to work on farms under exploitative conditions. Guest worker programs, internationally referred to as temporary worker programs, are being relied on more and more by wealthier industrialized nations of the global North to satisfy their labor needs in agriculture, as well as some other industries. (Canada, Australia, and the E.U. in fact make greater use of guest worker programs than the U.S.)

On the surface these programs seem to satisfy the needs of all involved: providing a labor force for employers and employment opportunities for workers in other countries. In reality, though, the way that H-2A is currently designed denies fundamental rights to farmworkers and places them in a position of vulnerability should they find themselves in an abusive workplace. Guest workers are tied to one employer, with no ability to seek another job should things not go well. They have no recourse to the federal court system should they have a need. And working as a guest worker does not lead even over the long term to any opportunity for more permanent immigrant status, locking workers into migrant status in which they have no choice but to spend most of the year away from their families. Guest worker programs also invariably discriminate against older and female workers. By creating a lower tier of legal rights and protections for farmworkers, the H-2A program is in essence a means by which we can virtually “outsource” our agricultural work force while still having workers physically in the U.S. – making use of foreign labor without in turn granting these workers the rights and privileges guaranteed by all other workers in the U.S.

In 2006 and 2007 we witnessed the largest marches and rallies in recent U.S. history – larger than any anti-war protests to date – as immigrants and their allies called for a fair immigration reform. By joining farmworkers, organic farmers and the organic community in general can have a major impact on the future direction of immigration policy, ensuring that it meets the needs of both workers and employers and leads us toward a more just food system.

Resources to learn more, and to keep up to date:

Richard Mandelbaum is policy coordinator for CATA, el Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (Farmworker Support Committee), Richard also has a certified organic market garden in Massachusetts.

CATA is a farmworker organization comprised of and governed by migrant workers from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean working on farms in the U.S. CATA’s work is focused primarily in the mid-Atlantic region of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. For more information, go to www.cata-cata.org, or contact CATA at: CATA, PO Box 510, Glasboro NJ 08028; (856) 881-2057

1 See for example, Bernstein, Nina, Immigration Raids Cause Fear on New York Farms, December 24, 2006
3 Preston, Julia, Short on Labor, Farmers in U.S. Shift to Mexico, New York Times, September 5, 2007
5 Available on line at http://www.splcenter.org/legal/guestreport/index.jsp
6 Summaries of AgJOBS can be found at http://www.equaljusticecenter.org/news_page_46.htm and http://www.fwjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/AgJOBS.htm
Trainee Housing

This is Chapter 2.3 from “The On-Farm Mentor’s Guide” published by the New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) and written by Miranda Smith. The Guide also includes sections on “Farmers as Teachers and Mentors” and “Training Program Design.” Copies of the Guide are available from NESFI at PO Box 837, Belchertown, MA 01008-0379 or www.smallfarm.org for $35 plus 5% tax for Massachusetts residents and $4 shipping.

Housing has the potential to make or break your training program. This is an area where individual preferences make tremendous differences. For example, some people love hosting trainees in the family home and making them a temporary part of the family, while others love nothing more than coming home to a trainee-free zone at the end of the day.

Trainees have something to say about these matters, too. Some are happy to live in a tent or RV without running water or power, while others need a clean, quiet space with a working kitchen and bathroom to feel and work their best. But no matter what their preferences or your capabilities, there are some instances where federal, state, and local laws and regulations determine the type of housing you can offer your trainees.

Experienced mentors have as many stories about housing trainees as they have about interacting with them throughout a season. Simply living on the same farm, whether in the same house or in separate housing, creates an intimacy that few other teachers and students or bosses and workers experience. If you are new to mentoring, consider housing options carefully. A poor choice could sour experience. If you are new to mentoring, consider the suggestions in the box below might inspire useful changes. Experienced mentors created the “Residential Facilities Guidelines” (Worksheet #8, included in Section IV), which also provides a checklist that can help support residential facility design and assessment.

Mentor Guidelines

Mentor team members listed the following as being guidelines they would use in assessing trainee housing. They ask for:

- Housing that meets state and local codes
- House rules, posted in a visible location
- Access to adequate kitchen and bathroom facilities
- Privacy

Live-in Trainees

Farmers tend to ask trainees to live in their homes because it’s the most affordable option. This arrangement has certain advantages—it’s likely that the housing complies with federal, state, and local codes and regulations and also, it’s much easier to train apprentices into the “farm experience” when they are captive members of the household. But those gains may be offset by the lack of privacy everyone experiences and the seemingly constant presence of the other party.

Trainees and your children have no choice but to interact with each other when they live in the same house. Younger children sometimes view this as a invasion into their private lives, and even if they like particular trainees, resent the time they take from their parents. You may notice symptoms of what looks a lot like sibling rivalry, so it’s best to prepare for it ahead of time.

Older children may welcome trainees to the house and regard them as role models or just good company. When they are teenagers, they can form great relationships with trainees or develop strong and mutual antipathies with them.

But your children’s feelings are only half of the equation. No matter if your trainees like your children or not, they are almost never neutral or nonjudgmental about your parenting style. They are sure to have some opinions about the way you discipline your children or allocate household chores such as cleaning and cooking and may feel justified about stepping into family matters.

It’s wise to protect all parties in advance. Set up guidelines for trainees about acceptable ways to interact with the children when you interview. Let them know that you expect professional behavior, including the way you speak to your children and what they do or don’t do around the house, are not topics for discussion or comment.

Just as you must set boundaries for the trainees to follow, you will have to prepare your children, too. Depending on the child, you may want to create a schedule for special “private” times for just the two of you or “family” times when no one but family will be around. Give them daily opportunities to let you know if they need extra time, too, and do your best to give it to them.

Having trainees in the house gives children a wonderful opportunity to practice courtesy. Let them know that you must give the trainees the same level of respect and courtesy that they expect in return. There are seasons when this happens without thought because the trainees inspire good feelings and unfortunately, there are those when it’s so challenging that you have to turn it into a game.

Private lives. Your trainees’ private lives are going to be quite visible if they live in the house. Just as you and your family won’t relish comments about your private lives, your trainees won’t enjoy having their private matters or their relationships become fodder for public dissection. The interview is the time to assure them that you, and your children, will adhere to the same rules you are setting for them.
Keep these promises. Even if a trainee compliments you on your handling of a discipline problem with a child, don’t give in to the urge to discuss the matter. Once there’s one break in the boundary, others quickly follow. The working/teaching relationship is too valuable to jeopardize by overstepping personal bounds.

Kitchens and cooking.
Who cooks? Who washes the dishes? Who buys the groceries? Does anyone ever wash the floor? If you plan to live with trainees, these questions are critical. No matter what systems you devise, inform applicants about it during the interview. Discuss dietary preferences and restrictions, too. Some people cannot tolerate the odor of cooking meat, for example. If meat is a part of your diet, applicants should know this ahead of time, just as they should know if you don’t want them to bring any animal products into the kitchen.

Childish as it may seem, a posted chore rotation goes a long way towards making life easier when strangers live together. Trainees are likely to adjust to a chart like this if it’s already in place when they arrive. You may want to wait to work out the details in a discussion with the entire group, but initiate the idea from the beginning. And if your children are of an age to participate, use this opportunity to include them in the rotation. More than one farm child has learned to cook by taking a turn at making meals for the group.

House policies. Tired as they may be, some people relax best to a background of loud music. Other people are accustomed to the drone of a TV. By all means, set house policies about these matters. You may want to restrict media to certain hours or ask that people wear headphones. But again, don’t wait until after a problem comes up to set this kind of policy.

Your trainees’ visitors can be a boon or a nuisance. Most farmers develop visitor restrictions, allowing them to stay a maximum of three days, for example, or requiring a certain amount of help from all but the most aged or the very young. Again, set this policy before the season and inform apprentices about it during the interview.

You may or may not tolerate alcohol and cigarettes on your farm property. No matter what your preference, state it in the interview. Trainees need to know if they are coming to study on a farm where they cannot drink a beer at the end of the day or if it’s possible that people will be smoking, even if it’s outside. Needless to say, drugs put you and your farm at an enormous legal risk. Make it clear in the interview that you consider bringing any illegal drugs onto the farm as grounds for immediate dismissal.

More than one trainee has arrived on a farm accompanied by a pet. Prevent this sort of surprise by bringing up the subject in the interview. If you do allow trainees to bring pets, at least make an appointment to meet the animal in question and see how the animal interacts with any pets already on the farm.

Domestic Policies Check List

The following check list can help you prepare a written policy sheet to give to prospective trainees and post in their living quarters. While some of these items may not apply to your situation, review this list for provisions you may want to require. You can also use this list to develop a written “house contract” that both you and trainees sign at the beginning of the season.

1. Description of how trainees’ private spaces must be kept (no stored food products, no dirty dishes, laundry contained, general state of cleanliness)
2. Description of how trainees’ private spaces must be kept (no loud music, pets, etc.)
3. Description of how you plan to handle the use of the kitchen (no pets allowed, no smoking, etc.)
4. Description of how you plan to handle the living quarters (no pets allowed, no smoking, etc.)
5. Description of your expectations for the trainees’ behavior (no loud music, no smoking, etc.)
6. Description of any other rules you want to establish (no pets allowed, no smoking, etc.)
7. Description of any special arrangements you want to make (pets allowed, smoking allowed, etc.)

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The Joys of Living Separately

Not surprisingly, most mentors suggest setting up separate housing if you can possibly afford to do so. But separate housing varies in quality. More than one trainer has spent the season in pretty rough quarters—a yurt or tent with no running water, no electricity, and no heat. Potential trainees may regard this kind of housing as part of their farming experience—a summer of “camping out,” while others might take a look at it and decide to go elsewhere. But no matter how the trainees regard it, you should be aware that there are legal regulations governing farm worker housing.

Who’s a What?

No matter what you call your trainees—interns, apprentices, recruits, volunteers, or willing workers—chances are that the government considers them seasonal employees. Further, if they must spend nights away from their permanent residences in order to do the job, as is the case with many small farmers, they are legally defined as migrant workers, making their treatment subject to specific laws. Further discussion of these definitions and regulations is included in Chapter 3.2, “The Business End of On-Farm Mentoring.”

Housing legalities. Several legal issues come into play in the area of trainee housing. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.2, most farmers in the Northeast who host trainees are exempt from Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSAWPA) housing regulations because of a provision known as the 500 Man-Day Exemption. See Section 3.2, page 97 and Worksheet #3, included in Section IV. But even if you are exempt from MSAWPA requirements, it’s likely that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) housing regulations do apply to you. Check “OSHA Housing Regulations” (Worksheet #9, included in Section IV) for an overview of compliance requirements.

According to OSHA, if employees live on your farm and not in your own residence, they are living in a temporary or seasonal labor camp. Both the camp and worker’s living quarters are subject to OSHA provisions. Many states have their own OSHA regulations that supersede federal ones. Check to see if your state has such provisions and if so, what they are. For example, in the state of Massachusetts, farm labor camps are inspected by the Department of Public Health under regulations that apply to temporary or seasonal labor camps.

Trainees’ house policies. When you think about setting up separate housing for trainees, you’re likely to look forward to being released from policing them in off-hours. It’s an enormous relief to be able to leave them to their own devices after work hours and on their days off.

However, troubles between one trainee and another can bring you back into the fray. Trainees may have different standards for cleaning, for example. One may think that washing counters and the stovetop is a part of doing the dishes, while the other may be oblivious to these tasks at first and resistant once the omission is pointed out.

Mentors say that the best way to avoid such problems is to hold a meeting with all the trainees who will be living in farm housing on the very first day they are all present. You, as facilitator of this group may be beyond the need for such things, as a consequence, they do such things as throw combustible flour or even water on a grease fire.

A refrigerator in good repair will save you money on utility costs, so it’s worth buying a fairly good used one with tight-fitting seals and a good-sized freezer compartment. If you fall under OSHA regulations, inspectors will check the temperature of the refrigerator to make certain that it meets local code.

Hot water must also meet a temperature requirement and will be tested by inspectors if they happen to visit your farm. This is another area where scrupulousness is needed to avoid problems.

Bathrooms must be sanitary and cleaned daily—add this to the trainees’ chore rotation. Given how easy it is to get dirty while you’re farming, you might also want to require trainees to clean the bathtub every other week, even if they only stand in it to shower. Attention to such seemingly small details can make group living a pleasure instead of a nightmare.

Goslings, Ducklings, Chicks, Guinea Fowl, Turkeys, Pheasants, Chukars, and Equipment

Adequate kitchen and bathroom. Trainees who live in separate housing and who don’t eat with your family require an adequate kitchen. Make certain that it is safe and includes provision for baking as well as stovetop cooking. You’ll run into more than one trainee who doesn’t want to use a microwave oven, so this certainly isn’t mandatory, but an outside grill, even a small charcoal one, is a nice amenity.

A refrigerator in good repair will save you money on utility costs, so it’s worth buying a fairly good used one with tight-fitting seals and a good-sized freezer compartment. If you fall under OSHA regulations, inspectors will check the temperature of the refrigerator to make certain that it meets local code.

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Bringing Fair Trade Home: The Agricultural Justice Project

Elizabeth Henderson, NOFA
Richard Mandelbaum, CATA

Since 1999 when they initiated the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP), Michael Sligh of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI - USA), Richard Mandelbaum of Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas/Farmer Support Committee (CATA), and Elizabeth Henderson of Peacework Organic Farm and NOFA-NY have been seeking an effective way to bring attention back to the social and economic needs of the people, farmers and farmworkers, whose life work has been the creation of organic and sustainable agriculture.

With the smallest of resources, they decided to draft social stewardship standards, translating the abstract notion of social justice into the concrete terms of pricing and working conditions. Over four years, they put those standards through a public review process, soliciting comments and criticisms from farmers, farmworkers, certifiers, traders and other stakeholders around the world, and in doing this, built relationships with many people who share their passion to develop a model of a just food system.

Once the standards were in place, the next step was to test them on the ground with a pilot project. In order to design the pilot, the AJP three, joined by Marty Mesh of Florida Organic Growers (FOG) did informal inspections of farms in four regions of the country. These exploratory audits confirmed that AJP standards are realistic: farmers expressed the ability and desire to meet them. Meanwhile, FOG’s Quality Certification Services (QCS) developed the application and inspection forms, report language, and confidentiality documents necessary for a social justice certification. The AJP also convened a national Advisory Council representing a broad array of stakeholders to advise and inform the group’s progress.

While the AJP was conducting these exploratory audits, Minneapolis-based Local Fair Trade Network (LFTN) was exploring how to develop and promote fair trading practices among its members, which include family-scale farmers, food co-ops, farmer organizations, and consumers. It was a natural match and the two groups decided to partner together on a regional pilot launch in the Upper Midwest. The Local Fair Trade Network facilitated access to farmers, co-ops, and consumers who were already engaged in the movement, and provided networking and marketing expertise; and the Agricultural Justice Project provided internationally vetted standards and certification capacity.

“A pre-audit” of several of the region’s exemplary family farm co-ops in 2006 revealed outstanding practices, but a lack of the type of documentation that would be required for verification by a certifier. Over the following winter, the AJP team developed a toolkit of informational resources to help farmers and co-ops document their good practices.

Together AJP and LFTN held a public launch in late July 2007. With a series of events at participating co-ops, the movement area restaurants, and a local grocery, they attracted publicity and helped set the stage for expansion of the program. LFTN worked with the co-ops to inform members about the new label and marketing initiatives addressing social and economic needs. These initiatives vary widely in their principles and level of detail. Most importantly, an analysis of these emerging projects reveals a disturbing trend: many do not include representatives of all sectors of the agricultural community.

This serious gap threatens the future success of such work. For this reason a variety of organizations have over the past few years begun to form a new Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA). In addition to AJP partners, primary participants have included Equal Exchange, Organic Valley, Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, and Farmer Direct (a Canadian organic farmers’ cooperative). Several farmworker organizations besides CATA have also been participating in the founding of DFTA, and on April 28 - 30, 2007, close to forty representatives from the farmworker community attended the first Farmworker Conference on Fair Trade in Owatonna, Minnesota.

In early December DFTA will hold its first official meeting in La Farge, Wisconsin. Approximately thirty organizations, including NOFA, have applied in the first round of membership applications. DFTA is being founded with the mission to educate the public, to promote and endorse Fair Trade and Social Justice labels and principles, and to defend associated labels against marketplace cooptation. Its work will include:

- Improving the livelihoods of family farmers and workers in the food, fiber and agricultural products industry through advocacy, endorsements and education.
- Developing sound criteria for endorsing legitimate Social Justice market claims.
- Promoting endorsements of legitimate Social Justice market claims made by and for family-sized farmers, processors, retailers, farm workers and their organizations, that are authentic, transparent and meet the DFT criteria for meaningful claims.
- Developing and implementing proactive strategies for protecting and enhancing such endorsed claims, for ensuring consumer confidence and developing mechanisms for external marketplace messaging and education.
- Developing and requiring a common ethical code of conduct among retailers/sellers of these products, with cooperative strategies to prevent and defend against green washing and false or misleading claims.

Background: Why Domestic Fair Trade?

Agricultural communities in the U.S. are in economic turmoil. U.S. agriculture has been in a long and steady trend of consolidation and mechanization, resulting in increasingly larger and fewer farms. This has affected both the owners of farms (farmers) and agricultural employees (farmworkers). While huge profits continue to be made in the agricultural sector, less and less of these profits are returning to those who work the land. Overall farm income continues to drop, and farmworkers’ wages are now below what they were thirty years ago, when adjusted for inflation, and prevent farmworkers from being able to work their way out of poverty.

The economic hardships suffered by small farmers and even more so by farmworkers are two symptoms of the same underlying politico-economic trend. Perhaps even more fundamental than the economic complexities are the cultural implications of the current food system, which has resulted in a process of alienation. Farmers become producers, farmworkers become wage laborers, and communities become mere consumers. Communities have lost contact with the growers of their food, and while farmers and farmworkers may still work closely together, farmers are compelled by the current model to view their workers as but one of many economic resources on the farm.

Organic agriculture, on the other hand, has its roots in the broader progressive movement. Its founders saw organic agriculture as a means to build a new way of life that would support our natural environment, and defend against green washing and false or misleading claims.
have converted to organic purely as a marketing decision. Although this still carries with it the benefit of reducing pesticide use in agriculture, these “new” organic farms often perpetuate the injustices present in agriculture in general - such as decreasing income for small-scale farmers, and exploitative working conditions for farmworkers. This trend has accelerated since the onset of the National Organic Program (NOP) and accompanying USDA oversight of organic certification.

In 1999 the USDA explicitly took the position that social justice and workers’ rights were not part of the definition of organic agriculture. It was in response to this that Michael Sligh, Richard Mandelbaum, and Elizabeth Henderson began a stakeholder process to develop standards for the fair and just treatment of the people involved in organic and sustainable agriculture. This initiative has slowly evolved into the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP), founded to create fairness and equity in our food system through the development of social justice standards for organic and sustainable agriculture. The Project is unique in its linking of the welfare of three core constituencies: workers, farmers, and retailers; and in the formulation and discussion of social standards stemming from these communities rather than on their behalf by others.

All three of the initiators of AJP have experience as family-scale organic farmers. Michael left full-time farming 20 years ago to work on agricultural policy. As a staff member of RAFI-USA, he focuses on a cluster of issues – organic standards, eco-labeling, GMOs, and seeds and breeds. Elizabeth is well known to NOFA members as a farmer and writer and as their representative to the national scene where she has co-chaired the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture Organic Committee together with Michael. In 2007, the NOFA Interstate Council voted unanimously to endorse Elizabeth’s work with AJP and to become a formal member of the project.

Richard runs a small herb farm in New York State while working full-time for CATa, which delegated him to take on this social justice project as their representative.

Although the “on the ground” work of AJP is to build a working model of social justice certification, the project is based upon a wider vision and set of principles that guide the project’s work. The full vision statement is available on the AJP website (see below), or by hard copy upon request.

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**Vision**

We “need to become independent of the world market economy because the world market economy is ultimately controlled by interests which seek power or profit and which do not respond to the need of the world’s peoples.”
— Basic Call to Consciousness, Akwesasne Notes

We believe that the current industrial model of the food system has failed small farmers, farm workers, indigenous peoples, rural communities, and the public alike. Around the world, the family farmer is rapidly disappearing, unable to compete with an agribusiness supported by various direct and hidden subsidies, including the abundance of cheap labor. As fundamental as the economic issues are the cultural implications of the current industrial food system, which separates those who eat from the source of their food. In this alienating system, food becomes a commodity, plant varieties become genetic property, farmers become producers, farm workers become wage laborers, and members of communities are converted into individual consumers, while market forces manipulate all these elements for maximum profit by agribusiness. Communities have lost contact with the growers of their food and the soil from which it comes. In contrast, we envision a food system that begins with stewardship of the land, that produces food with respect for the ecology of the field, the farm, the watershed, the region and the earth, that uses appropriate, non-violent technology and distributes that technology’s benefits fairly. We will replace the
current subsidies and pricing mechanisms with a system of full-cost accounting that gives incentives for reductions in energy use and penalizes pollution or depletion of the commons of air, water, and soil in the production and distribution of food.

A commitment to social justice and social and ecological responsibility will characterize this food system. Decisions will embody a commitment to place: the farm as an integral part of the neighborhood and landscape. This new agricultural system will be committed to the regeneration of rural and farming communities and will acknowledge that farming is a way of life, not simply a means of making a living.

History of AJP and the Development of Standards

AJP Project partners RAFI, CATA, NOFA, and FOG (Florida Organic Growers / Quality Certification Services) are leaders in the fields of sustainable agriculture policy, workers' rights, community-based food systems, and organic certification. Each of the non-profit organizations in this unique partnership is grounded in decades of grassroots change-making and community-organizing. A fifth AJP partner organization is Fundación RENACE (La Red Nacional de Acción Ecológica), a network that represents indigenous communities throughout Bolivia, from the Andean highlands to the lowlands of the Amazon basin, engaged in traditional, organic farming practices. RENACE’s involvement in the project helps to ensure the universality and international applicability of the AJP standards and model.

The initial phase of AJP was to create social standards for sustainable and organic agriculture; to codify in concrete terms what making a legitimate claim of “social justice” means. AJP partners knew that such a claim would be a powerful tool in the marketplace, and would need to be backed up by strong standards and a reliable verification system. These draft standards were first published in Toward Social Justice and Economic Equity in the Food System: A Call for Social Stewardship in Sustainable and Organic Agriculture. The standards have gone through several revisions based on comments and feedback submitted by a diverse spectrum of organizations and individuals, and have become widely known and cited for their usefulness in establishing what social justice standards should include, based on the perspective and needs of the communities most affected.

This initial draft was sent for review to organic farmers and organic farming associations, nonprofits, certification programs, eco-labeling experts, and labor and farm labor organizations. To make the document accessible to a wider audience, the standards were translated into Spanish and French. With each major revision of the document the new draft was circulated to those who had commented on previous drafts, as well as to people new to the project.

Since 1999 AJP partners have hosted an ongoing series of meetings within and outside the U.S. on social justice in organic and sustainable agriculture. These meetings have been instrumental in bringing to the same table those agencies and certifying organizations that more regularly discuss these issues, together with grassroots organizations representing small-scale farmers, farmworkers, indigenous peoples, and consumer advocacy organizations. Such meetings have facilitated more grassroots involvement in standards setting, as well as more recognition of communities’ needs by certifiers and their allies, and have included:

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The creation of an alternative model creates the space for these three groups - small-scale farmers and their workers, small-scale farmers, and farmworkers, and gain access to food produced in accordance with their principles and ethics. Such a model would be one concrete step in progressing toward a more sustainable food system, in which, as stated in the principles of IFOAM, the “entire production, processing and distribution chain [would be] both socially just and ecologically responsible.” In this alternate vision, farm work would be valued by the larger society in direct proportion to the importance of food in peoples’ lives, thereby allowing family farmers to remain on the land, and farmworkers and their families to live a full and healthy life.

AJP’s Richard Mandelbaum and a long-time worker at pilot farm Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables discussing the program.

More information, including contact information, is available at: www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org
Featherstone Farm: A Leader in Fair Trade Labor Standards

by Jack Kittredge

Southeastern Minnesota is “bluff country.” Land is either high (“ridge top farms”) or low (“valley farms”), which are distinguished by quite different micro-climates. High land tends to be drier and better for crops such as tomatoes and melons, which need good air drainage to avoid fungal diseases. But low land is generally wetter and richer, producing great onions and root crops, and desirable in times of drought.

Jack Hedin, who owns Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables, farms on 100 rented acres of both types in and about Rushford, Minnesota, about 20 miles west of Wisconsin and 15 miles north of Iowa. His operation, which has been certified organic since 1997, serves a 400-family CSA as well as selling to food coops in the Twin Cities and wholesalers such as Whole Foods in Minneapolis and Chicago.

Hedin is not a farm boy, having grown up in the suburbs. But he was drawn to farm work and served for 9 years on other people’s farms as an apprentice, worker, and farm manager before starting his own. He found his experience on farms in California particularly helpful, where he worked alongside Mexicans – whom he found wonderful to work with -- and was motivated to set up a similar operation himself.

He is married and has three young sons, the oldest of whom is 12 and helps out on the farm. The oldest two have their own gardens. His wife is a social service worker in nearby Winona and doesn’t presently work on the farm. He had a partner for seven years, from 2000 to 2006. That was a very successful relationship, but the partner developed health problems last year and had to retire.

Jack rents 7 parcels from a land coop to which he belongs. Much of the coop’s land is wet and poorly drained, and this year in July a torrential downpour flooded 30 acres of his vegetables. All the land is suitable for mechanized operations (the farm has 9 tractors and a broad range of implements) but most of the harvesting is still done by hand.

Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables employs 15 or 16 seasonal employees. Some are English-speaking, but many are Mexicans.

“My English speaking employees are mostly young people from around here,” Hedin says, “generally from farm families. They might stay 4 to 6 years until they move on to college or fulltime jobs. One girl left us and had learned enough to start her own CSA. I felt that was a great success!”

The whole family goes back to central Mexico from November to February. “I’ve offered them work and housing for their families if they want to bring them,” Hedin says. “If they wanted to stay all year I’d create the work for them. But they prefer it this way. They don’t want to permanently leave Mexico.”

But English speakers are only a third of Jack’s workforce. Two-thirds speak Spanish.

“All our Spanish-speakers,” he says, “are from a single extended Mexican family. They are a wonderful family. When we started up and needed help my partner and I went to a turkey processing plant in a nearby town and advertised. We started with one member of the family, then when we needed more, brothers and cousins came. Now we have 5 brothers working here full time, plus some of their friends and relations.”

The Mexican workers speak very little English so Jack has learned a little Spanish and says they can get along well enough to do farm work.

“They would love to learn more English, he says, but in the summertime we’re all working 120 hours a week and there is just no time. They have lots of friends and relationships in town, however, so the language is not too much of a barrier. One neighbor even visited them twice during the winter at their home down in Mexico. He said when he first went, in 2002, the family had 6 or 8 cattle. When he went back this year they had 60! Now that is real wealth in Mexican terms, and built from earnings working on a farm in Minnesota.”

Featherstone’s hourly pay is compatible with other farms in the area. The starting rate for someone with no experience is $7 an hour. All workers can take whatever produce they like, as well. There is a 60-day trial period, after which workers generally get a 50¢ raise, plus another 25¢ raise in September. If they come back for another year, there is generally another raise for them, depending on how good a worker they have been. But one benefit Featherstone offers is unusual on a farm – profit-sharing.

“The way the profit sharing works is this,” Hedin explains. “I have my own $32,000 salary, so whatever is left over at the end of the year is profit. We have a formula for how it is distributed – so much to debt, so much to the workers by way of years of service, responsibility, etc. This year we had terrible flooding and lost 30 acres of crops so there won’t be any profit. Last year my partner had heart surgery and things were crazy so we didn’t have a profit. But we started this in 2005 when we had a profit. So we only had money for it one year in three.

Jack’s Mexican workers right now are earning from $7.50 to $9.50 an hour, plus produce plus profit-sharing. In addition, he provides them free housing in trailers and cabins on the property. “We have to be in compliance with all the labor laws in Minnesota,” he says. “So the housing is all inspected and approved for occupancy by the state Department of Labor. And of course we also pay unemployment and workers compensation.”

In one regard, however, Featherstone takes exception with local labor laws.

Michael Sligh, one of the domestic Fair Trade movement, with Hedin on his farm. Jack holds a cherry tomato from one of his fields.

The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2007 - 08
“The law says that after 60 hours in a week you pay time and a half,” Hedin explains. “Now we can’t afford to pay time and a half, but we work long hours. So we were prepared to cut our employees off at 60 hours and hire extra workers. But our existing help said they would rather work the extra hours themselves, for regular pay, than stop after 60 hours and have others do the work. I figure the laws are to protect these workers, but if they would rather waive that protection and get more hours, they should have the right to decide.

“Our Fair Trade certification requires a contract in Spanish with our Spanish-speaking employees,” he continues. “So we wrote a waiver into the contract. I don’t know if it is legal, but I feel we have to respect them to tell us if they are working too much. Even so, sometimes we will bring in spot crews when there is just more than we all can do.”

Jack almost rhapsodizes when talking about the Mexicans working for him.

“They can do any of my work, run any of my tractors and implements. They are excellent drivers – cautious and careful. They make many of my deliveries. Although they don’t have Minnesota licenses because of the fear factor, if they get pulled over they show their Mexican licenses and just get a warning about having to get a Minnesota one after 30 days in the state.”

Hedin, like many farm employers who hire Mexicans, is nervous about their status in this country.

“I have paperwork on all of them, of course,” he says. “I withhold and make regular payments reporting my payroll. But every year I have reason to be concerned about them being able to come back. I don’t know how the social security administration deals with these guys, but sometimes the IRS or Minnesota will write to them. I just give them the letters, of course, and don’t know what they say. But I wring my hands about it.

“Right now no one has an incentive to look further into the situation,” he continues. “There is one proposal out there to create a national database of social security numbers and require employers to check it. But that would be a disaster for all agricultural employers.”

Jack has strong feelings about the difficulties migrant workers experience in this country.

“For the last 5 to 10 years there has been a rapid growth of Hispanics working in Minnesota,” he says, “largely because they have been brought in to work in the meat-packing and freezing and canning facilities. It is hard to get enough Americans to take those jobs. No doubt there are a few bad apples in every barrel, but we owe a debt of gratitude to these Mexican-Americans who live and work among us. I get steamed up when I read about them being vilified in the press.

“I’ve worked hard to get long term visas for my workers,” he continues. “I’ve worked to get employer-sponsored visas for them for the past 4 years. I’m willing to guarantee employment, housing, health care, transport. The trouble is, once a person comes into the country illegally, there is an automatic 10 year bar to their being readmitted legally. The justification is that ‘we don’t want to reward people who have broken the law’. But to get a sponsor you have to have a relationship with someone here, which is difficult to establish without being here and proving yourself. If there were Mexicans from the family who works here who had not been in the US already I could bring them here through the current “guest worker” program. It is cumbersome and expensive, but I could do it. But they have all been here.”

“Right now no one has an incentive to look further into the situation,” he continues. “There is one proposal out there to create a national database of social security numbers and require employers to check it. But that would be a disaster for all agricultural employers.”

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Transplanting has just finished in this field. Shortly after this picture was taken Southern Minnesota experienced torrential rains and flooding. Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables got 17 inches of rain in one day. Jack lost 30 acres of produce.
payments, traffic stops – you can’t come.”

With the failure of the administrations proposed immigration reforms in Congress, agricultural employers and the United Farm Workers are currently backing a bill that they hope to attach to the farm bill. It would separate out agricultural jobs from more comprehensive immigration reform, allowing agricultural workers to enter the country despite the 10-year bar. Hedin supports that.

“What I want is not a meat market of bodies,” he states. “I can get that already. What I want is skilled people who are already here and working to be legal. These people know about organic produce, equipment, all the issues involved in raising organic food. There are an awful lot of people like my Mexican family in this country who feed and house us. I was re-reading The Grapes of Wrath recently and realized that they are the 21st century’s Joad family – they’re hardworking, honest, care about their family.”

Jack has been active in the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) and recently secured certification for Featherstone as a Domestic Fair Trade farm. That involves having written policies that govern employment, marketing, and some farming practices.

“The AJP is codifying standards and policies that are no more than the right way to treat people,” he says. “There are several ecological sustainability programs out there, but this Domestic Fair Trade is a human sustainability program. It is a way to seek a public endorsement of what good farmers are doing already.

“We just got our certification in July and haven’t done much to promote it,” he continues. “I was going to do an article in our CSA newsletter, but then we got 17 inches of rain in one day and lost 30 acres of crops.”

Hedin feels that his strengths are his customers and his employees. The AJP has encouraged him to keep better employment records, issue written contracts, and cooperate with their insurance company in setting up formal equipment training programs for...
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Five Mexican brothers are the core workers at Featherstone Farm.

New!

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25844 Butler Rd. - Junction City, OR 97448
Fax: (541) 998-0106
1-888-516-7797
www.biodynamics.com/Orders/
Interviews conducted and translated by Richard Mandelbaum

Members of the same extended family have been traveling to southeastern Minnesota to work on Featherstone Farm for several years. Here are some of their impressions of working on the farm and in agriculture in general. Names have been changed to protect peoples’ privacy.

Q: How has it been to work on Featherstone Farm?

Juan: We are so thankful that we are working for Jack. He is always concerned for us. He never gets angry or “bossy” with us like in other places we have worked.

Arturo: Jack always helps out with extra costs, like airfare. He is also trying to help us with our visas.

Hector: Yes, we’d like to keep returning to work here every year. But we’re not sure what is going to happen with immigration here, so who knows? There really should be more visas available for people to work.

Q: How has it been for you to work on an organic farm, as compared to other, non-organic farms you have worked on in the past?

Juan: Working on an organic farm has been an incredible thing – just being able to grab a vegetable and eat it and not have to be worried! And everything grows so well. On other farms where they use chemicals, you walk around scared. Not here.

Q: Have you seen any benefits from the farm’s participation in the Agricultural Justice Project?

Hector: The project has been a real benefit for us. Our wages were also increasing, although the flood interrupted that. But we had more of an understanding - felt more strongly that we need to help the farm to succeed - because of the meetings that had taken place. We also learned more about our legal rights, and although working here was always good, things improved even more.

Richard Mandelbaum talking with workers at Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables.
There are many farmworker organizations and farmworker allies throughout the country. Here is a short list of some of them – the links on each of these websites will lead to more resources. All text is taken from the websites of the respective organizations.

**Farmworker Organizations:**

**CATA - The Farmworkers Support Committee** - was founded by migrant farmworkers in southern New Jersey in 1979. CATA's mission is to empower and educate farmworkers through leadership development and capacity building so that they are able to make informed decisions regarding the best course of action for their interests.

CATA P.O. Box 510 Glassboro, NJ 08028 Telephone: (856) 881-2507 Fax: (856) 881-2027 http://cata-farmworkers.org/

**Centro Campesino**:

Our mission is to improve the lives of migrant workers and rural Latina/os and to create a strong southern Minnesota Latino/a voice. Guided by our values of faith, hope, unity and justice, we are a membership organization that was born and exists to create positive social change.

PO Box 525
104 1/2 West Broadway Street #206
Owatonna, MN 55060
tel: 507.446.9599
http://centrocampesino.net/

**The Coalition of Immokalee Workers** is a community-based worker organization. Our members are largely Latino, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida.

P. O. Box 603
Immokalee, FL 34143
Phone: (239) 657-8311
http://www.ciw-online.org/

**The Farmworker Association of Florida** is a non-profit, community-based membership organization that was established in 1983 in Central Florida to respond to the needs of the farmworker community and to organize farmworkers more effectively in their struggle for better housing, wages, and working conditions. The mission of the Association is to empower farmworker and rural poor communities to respond to and gain control over the social, political, economic, workplace, health, and environmental justice issues that affect their lives.

Main Office
815 S. Park Ave.
Apopka, FL 32703
(407)886-5151
http://www.charityadvantage.com/thefarmworkerassociationofflorida/HomePage.asp

**Community to Community Development** is a women-led place based, grassroots organization working for a just society and healthy communities. We are committed to systemic change and to creating strategic alliances that strengthen local and global movements toward social, economic, and environmental justice.

203 W. Holly, Suite 317
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-738-0893
http://foodjustice.org/wp/

**PCUN / Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste** (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), is Oregon’s union of farmworkers, nursery, and reforestation workers, and Oregon’s largest Latino organization. PCUN’s fundamental goal is to empower farmworkers to understand and take action against systematic exploitation and all of its effects. To achieve this end, PCUN is involved in community and workplace organizing on many different levels.

300 Young St.

**Woodburn, OR 97071**
503-982-0243
http://www.pcun.org/

**UFW**: Founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers of America is the nation’s first successful and largest farm workers union currently active in 10 states. The UFW continues to organize and represent farm workers, including 27,000 farm workers who labor under union contracts at least one day out of the year.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
PO. Box 62
20700 Woodford-Tehachapi Road
Keene, CA 93531
(661) 823-6250
http://www.ufw.org/

Resources for Information on Farmworkers
Allied Organizations:

**Farmworker Justice** is a nonprofit organization that engages in litigation, administrative and legislative advocacy, training and technical assistance, coalition-building, public education and support for union organizing. Farmworker Justice was founded in 1981 and is based in Washington, D.C. Farmworker Justice works with farmworkers and their organizations throughout the nation. Farmworker Justice monitors and analyzes decisions by Congress, the White House, the courts and administrative agencies that affect farmworkers.

Farmworker Justice
1126 16th Street, N.W., Suite 270
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone (202) 293-5420 Fax # (202) 293-5427
http://www.fwjustice.org/

**Friends of Farmworkers** has particularly close ties with the Mexican mushroom worker community in Chester and Berks County and also works closely with Philadelphia’s Asian community regarding the concerns of immigrant, refugee and migrant workers. To improve the living and working conditions of indigent farmworkers, mushroom workers, food processing workers, and workers from immigrant and migrant communities.

924 Cherry Street, 4th floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107-2411
(215) 733-0878
http://www.friendsfw.org/

**The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)** is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It serves as a forum to share information and analysis, to educate communities and the general public, and to develop and coordinate plans of action on important immigrant and refugee issues. We work to promote a just immigration and refugee policy in the United States and to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status.

510-465-1984
http://www.nnirr.org/

**Rural & Migrant Ministry** is a multi-faith organization serving rural and migrant people in New York since 1981 through programs of youth empowerment, education, and accompaniment.

POB 4757
Poughkeepsie, NY 12602
Phone: (845) 485-8627
http://ruralmigrantministry.org/

**Student Action with Farmworkers** is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

SAF accomplishes its mission by working with farmworkers to address their concerns through documentation of human rights violations, grassroots education and mobilization, leadership development of young people, policy advocacy, and support of labor organizing.

1317 W. Pettigrew St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-660-3652
http://cds.aas.duke.edu/saf/

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of America’s present energy course to retooling the way we do agriculture and energy along the regenerative principles of Permaculture design. There are sidebars on the restoration of degraded prairie farmland using highly complex fuel crop polycultures, and the practice of swale contour farming to replenish groundwater and topsoil. His vision for a grassroots ethanol revolution is ambitious but conceivable: “A nationwide switch to organic farming is in order, but it can’t work if we maintain a monoculture-based system, with its present emphasis on corn farming.”

The second big section of Alcohol Can Be a Gas has five chapters laying out the How To’s of alcohol production for fuel. Chapters include feedstocks for ethanol production, fermentation technology, distillation, and plant design. It is here that Blume’s farming background starts to shine, when he writes about ethanol feedstocks and their individual soil building properties when combined with other practices of sustainable farming. Thirty different feedstocks are described in depth, including algae, beets, buffalo gourd, comfrey, Jerusalem artichokes, sorghum, whey and waste products, as well as the detriments of using GMO corn. There are substantial discussions on feedstocks for urban/suburban distillers as well as the current state of affairs for cellulosic ethanol. Blume starts this chapter by saying: “Many energy crops can thrive in arid or swampy lands, artificial marshes used for sewage treatment, or brackish water that interfaces with land; there are even crops that require no soil at all. Some crops considered weeds or useless already cover vast areas. They represent a current resource that, by my calculations, can be managed sustainably to produce billions of gallons of ethanol and co-products per year right now.”

The chapters on fermentation and distillation are do-it-yourselfer’s dream, with great graphics and illustrations. Many different production units are described in detail, with the pros & cons of each and a thorough discussion of the protocols involved.

Section III deals with secret treasures that can be found buried in the ethanol production process: ‘co-products’. These are saleable or otherwise useful byproducts of ethanol production, and Blume says there may be hundreds, such as livestock and aquaculture feeds, worms, yeast, methane, protein, and propagation material for mushroom production. These co-products Blume argues can be more valuable than the ethanol.

Sections IV, V & VI are mini-tomes that address the mechanics, regulations and tax subsidies for using alcohol in engines. “We can put 85% alcohol in our cars now! Really!” says Blume. Included are chapters for the great heads who want to convert their cars, chapters on the business of alcohol: its economic, regulatory and legal considerations, and chapters on using ethanol in micro co-generation units to generate both heat and electricity.

One of the more inspiring concepts Blume had developed is a practical vision of small-scale ethanol use that he dubbs “Community Supported Energy.” This is modeled after a CSA where a group of drivers would form a cooperative, develop a site where fuel can be dispensed, enlist a manager to organize deliveries & apply for all of the available tax credits (50-60 cents/gallon), and help prospective members to convert their vehicles. Eventually, when this CSE gets enough experience under its belt, it could start to contract with farmers to grow ethanol crops and process them specifically for the Coop. Blume thinks contracting for production would be feasible with a CSE that has reached about 1,000 members.

Six case studies depict the type of grassroots on-farm ethanol production the author envisions in his revolution. Appendices give a detailed analysis of the debate on how much energy is required to produce ethanol (the ‘net energy ratio’), explain how to convert vehicles to ethanol, and give the reader an overview of the primary principles of permaculture design.

One criticism I have of Alcohol Can Be a Gas is that Blume is unashamedly caustic towards the large energy corporations. This book may alienate those large energy corporations. This book may alienate...
middle Americans who are uninformed about the dirty business of corn. It is, however, tailor written for activists who want to put their shoulders to the millstone and do something about our petroleum addiction. It is also a glossary, resources and reference section.

High Tunnels: Using low-cost technology to increase yields, improved quality, and extend the season.

The film ends with the Iowa farm where they rented the land going on the auction block as so many others before it. Ian and Curt decide to buy their acre and return it to native prairie grass and the final scene shows them playing baseball there, a “La Field of Dreams”.

If you want to get an average person to consider the consequences of our addition to corn and its cheap food products, this is a pretty good vehicle. It has been compared to “Super size Me” for taking on an icon of our culture in an approachable fashion. The film has just opened around the country and I expect it will be quite talked about!

Beef & Corn: The Story of Grass Fed Beef
by Barbara Kingsolver, Steven L. Hoop and Camille Kingsolver
cover hardcover, $16.17 from Amazon.com
more info at www.animalvegetablemineral.com
review by Gray Harrison

“Agriculture, Vegetable, Miracle” was given to me by some friends early last June, just as our garden was starting to flower. I was a little hesitant to give it a read since some of Barbara Kingsolver’s other writings had failed to hold my attention. However, I had just finished another very compelling book about the state of food in America, Michael Pollan’s “The Omnivore’s Dilemma.” I was interested to see what Ms. Kingsolver had to add to the discussion.

According to the jacket of the book, she and her family were willing to commit to a year of eating only locally grown food, and in these days of peak oil and economic uncertainty, I was intrigued to find out how such an experiment would work out. So, in between weeding the garlic and picking string beans, I dove in to “A Year of Food Life”.

The day’s work done, it was with great pleasure I would sit down on quiet and peaceful summer evenings to connect with the Kingsolver’s as they explored what life is like when you are committed to being part of your local food-o-sphere. It definitely requires a huge shift in attitude if you, like me, have grown up expecting to be able to eat anything you want, anytime you want it. The Kingsolver’s not only had to change their expectations about food availability, they actually had to change their address! They had lived for many years in Tucson,
AZ, a place that, as it says in the book, “might as well be a space station” in terms of human sustenance. Every morsel of food comes from far away, and every drop of water comes from a nonrenewable or increasingly distant source. So, after years of planning and discussion, they packed their bags and headed to the old family homestead in southern Appalachia, where, in the immortal words of Sam Kinison, “the food is”. Water falls from the sky, green things grow, and people are not so far removed in time from the era when all food was both local and organic. Ah yes, I said to myself, it sounds an awful lot like New England, and the more I learned about the Kingsolver’s story, the more convinced I became that we new Englander’s could learn to live locally (again), too.

The book chronicles the family’s experiment in local food; from the move to their new home, the first spring day when they broke free from the industrial food web, and the days and weeks of planting, weeding, harvesting, and storing the bounty of their land and their neighbor’s land. They planned to eat only what was available within a 100 mile radius, with a few small exceptions. Before you say, “Hey, I can’t live without bananas!” know that each family member was able to choose a special food item that might break the 100 mile rule. Barbara’s partner Steven, a man after my own heart, chose coffee. As I imagined how I might survive on a local only diet, I have to admit that Ethiopian coffee, Costa Rican chocolate, and French wine would all be very hard to part with. Tropical fruits would be sorely missed as well. Should I leave everything behind and move to Costa Rica where the food grows all year, the coffee is respectable, and I could indulge in chocolate guilt-free? I have to admit, it is a question that still haunts me, but if the experience of the Kingsolver’s is any guide, then our unique spot on the planet can provide everything we need and more. And, I don’t have to worry about bullet ants and eyelash vipers.

In between learning about how her daughter started an egg and chicken business, and how long a row of thistles they had to hoe, the most important points that Barbara Kingsolver makes in this book is that the current system of agriculture and food distribution in this country is not only incredibly wasteful, but completely unsustainable.

It is rather frightening to learn that Americans consume about 400 gallons of oil a year per person for agriculture. Most of that is used in transporting food: each food item in a typical meal has traveled 1500 miles! Facts such as these are interspersed throughout the book in informative sidebars, many of which offer positive steps to take in the direction of a sustainable future. For instance, one of Steven’s sidebars notes that “if every US citizen ate just one meal a week composed of locally and organically raised meat and produce, we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week.” Impressive, but according to the US Government’s Energy Information Agency, we profligate denizens of North America use almost 21 million barrels of oil each day. Worldwide thirst for oil: over 83 million barrels a day. Amount of oil needed to put fresh kale on my dinner plate almost every night for the past 4 months? Unknown, but miniscule, since I only had to use electrically pumped water to water plants occasionally. Of course, I can drink better with some of my other food and lifestyle choices, and this book has inspired me to do so.

For example, I learned how to can grape jam made from the concord grapes that grow along the edge of our garden, and my freezer is full of tomato sauce from our garden. I’ve also become obsessed with fermented foods, and at our learning center we are studying chemistry in part from the perspective of safe food storage.

OK, you say, you know all that, so why should you read this book? Because, in my opinion, “Animal, Vegetable, Miracle” is truly a pleasure to read. Plenty of hard facts for the analytic side of the brain, wonderful imagery and mouth-watering descriptions of fresh food for the right side of the brain, and woven throughout a romantic love story between the people and the earth that provides so bountifully. I think that’s what kept me coming back for more, because as the book described each micro-season of the year (such as the day the asparagus is ready), I was gaining more and more appreciation for the garden in my backyard and the community of people in this area who are striving to bring about a more sustainable food life for all of us. This is a very inspiring story, and has gained an esteemed position on the short list of books that has made a huge impact on how I live my life.

Agronomic practices have worked hand-in-hand with plant breeding in setting the stage for this nutrient decline. Together, the tactics farmers use to increase yields—including close plant spacing and the widespread use of chemical fertilizers, irrigation and pesticides—tend to create big plants that grow fast, but do not absorb a comparable quantity of many soil nutrients. The plants are dependent on highly soluble, readily available sources of nutrients applied by the farmers, as opposed to those distributed through each acre’s layer of topsoil. In fact, recent studies have shown that crops grown in poor quality, low organic matter soils sometimes are not able to absorb what is there, and can struggle to absorb nutrients even when the nutrients are present at high levels in the soil profile.

The Scientific Evidence

Government data from both America and the United Kingdom have shown that the concentration of a range of essential nutrients in the food supply has declined in the last few decades, with double-digit percentage declines of iron, zinc, calcium, selenium and other essential nutrients across a wide range of common foods. As a consequence, the same-size serving of sweet corn or potatoes, or a slice of whole wheat bread, delivers less iron, zinc and calcium. Fewer nutrients per serving translate into less nutrition per calorie consumed. This erosion in the biological value of food impacts consumers in much the same way as monetary inflation; that is, we have more food, but it’s worth less in terms of nutritional value.

The accuracy and reliability of historical data-sets on food nutrient composition have been questioned, since testing methods have changed so much over the years. Contemporary experiments, though, have confirmed that the nutrient decline observed in historical data-sets is real.

These experiments entail planting modern and historical crop varieties—or high- and low-yield varieties of the same crop—side-by-side, using comparable agronomic practices (e.g., tillage, planting method, sources and levels of nutrients, harvest method and timing). Studies with wheat, corn and broccoli have found that modern, high-yielding varieties generally have lower concentrations of nutrients than older, typically lower-yielding varieties.

The tradeoff between yield and nutrient levels seems to be widespread across crops and regions, as plants participating in the energy between different goals. Substantial data show that in corn, wheat and soybeans, the higher the yield, the lower the protein and oil content. The higher tomato yields (in terms of harvest weight), the lower the concentration of vitamin C, levels of lysocine (the key antioxidant that makes tomatoes red), and beta-carotene (a vitamin A precursor). High-production dairy cows produce milk that is less concentrated with fat, protein and other nutrition-enhancing components, and are also more vulnerable to a range of metabolic diseases, infections and reproductive problems.

Given these negative consequences linked to increasing yields and production levels, why the continuing, nearly universal focus on increasing yields and production, regardless of the associated costs?
No Free Lunch

Think of this relationship between yield and nutritional quality as farming’s equivalent of “no free lunch.” That is, higher yields, while desirable, may come with the hidden cost of lower nutritional quality, and in some cases, heightened risk of food safety and animal health problems.

As breeders have programmed plants to produce larger tomatoes, shorter-statured wheat with bigger grain heads, and corn that can tolerate closer spacing in the field, these plants have devoted less energy to other factors, like sinking deep roots and generating health-promoting compounds known as phytochemicals, many of which are antioxidants and vitamins.

The unintentional and largely unnoticed slippage in nutrient density has been accepted as a price of progress in boosting yields. After all, more total nutrients are harvested from a field of corn producing twice the yield, even if it means 20 percent less protein or iron per bushel. In addition, fortification of food with vitamins and minerals has been available, and used, to address blatant deficiencies in nutrient intake.

Further erosion in nutrient density should be avoided for several reasons. Americans need to consume foods that deliver more nutrients per calorie consumed. Science has yet to identify, much less understand, the nutritional benefits linked to thousands of phytochemicals produced by plants. Many epidemiological studies have concluded that there are likely many beneficial nutrients in fruits and vegetables that we do not know about.

Plus, the relative levels, or ratios of nutrients in food, may also play important roles in human nutrition and health promotion. And what we surely do not need are staple crops delivering more sugar and starch per serving, and lower levels of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Turning the Corner

Recent research shows that existing varieties of a given crop, whether pumpkins or peas or plums, vary widely in terms of their vitamin and mineral content. And this variability is inheritable, and it doesn’t necessarily interfere with crop yields. So it should be possible for crop breeders to favor these varieties or use them in breeding efforts to make our food more nutritious, with only modest impact on average yields.

Moreover, given that part of nutrient decline has resulted from farmers pushing crops towards maximum yields, changing certain farming strategies should help reverse the decline. For instance, although organic farming results in lower yields in many cases, studies show that it also tends to produce crops with higher concentrations of micronutrients, phytochemicals and other health-promoting compounds. The increases range from a few percent to sometimes 20 percent or more for certain minerals, and on average, about 30 percent in the case of antioxidants.

Many farmers now plant 30,000 or more corn seeds per acre, about three times the planting density common in the 1940’s. The volume of corn grain harvested per corn plant has changed little in the last half-century.

Some studies have reported even more dramatic differences in concentrations of specific phytochemicals—for example, nearly twice as much of two common antioxidants in organic tomatoes compared to conventional tomatoes. Organic forms of fertilizer, like manure or cover crops that offer more balanced mixes of nutrients and release the nutrients more gradually, encourage plants to develop more robust root systems that more aggressively absorb nutrients. At the same time, for a wide range of fruits, vegetables and grains, reducing pesticide use has been shown to boost phytochemical content, sometimes dramatically.

Might this general nutritional superiority of organic produce help justify the premium that consumers typically pay for organic food, or government policies to encourage a shift towards organic practices? Clearly, advantages linked to organic management will vary depending on the crop, soil quality and growing conditions, as well as on the technologies, inputs and systems in use on nearby conventional farms growing the same crop.

There will be some cases, usually linked to weather conditions, and pest levels and management, where conventional crops have higher nutritional quality than nearby organic crops. And, as organic farmers find ways to push yields close to the levels on conventional farms, the nutritional advantage of organic systems may narrow, and even disappear in some cases. Research is needed to identify farming systems and plant genetic innovations capable of increasing the nutrient content of foods without significant impacts on yields.

Significant erosion in the nutritional quality of the American diet rests on declining nutrient density in staple crops, coupled with increasing consumption of largely “empty” calories (“empty” in the sense that some foods contain high levels of added sugar and fat, and deliver very few nutrients per calorie consumed). Compared to half a century ago—when crop yields first began to climb dramatically—we are eating fewer nutrient-rich foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, and whole grains, and more highly processed foods. Contemporary epidemics of obesity and diabetes are among the direct consequences. This is why the U.S. government has placed so much emphasis on doubling average per capita consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Improving the nutritional quality of these foods, and indeed all crops, will be an important part of addressing larger nutritional and health problems, particularly as the baby-boom generation ages. Cost-effective health promotion and disease prevention will likely depend more and more on improving dietary choices, and the nutritional quality of the foods we choose to eat, rather than on ever-greater dependence on drug-based therapies and invasive surgical procedures.

The good news is that farmers, crop breeders and agricultural scientists will almost certainly be as successful in increasing nutrient density, as they have been in raising yields, once they shift their priorities. But for this to happen, our clear-cut need for food that delivers more nutrition per calorie consumed must drive the system on equal footing with the pursuit of ever-higher yields. It’s that simple, yet also exceedingly complex.
Surprise NOP Auditor Visits to Organic Farms and Processors in China: The Response to Concerns About Integrity of Organic Food Imports

by Roger Blobaum

Widely publicized reports of Chinese lapses in guaranteeing the safety of its food exports, including press reports raising questions about the integrity of its organic food imports, suggest an urgent need to increase government and industry oversight that will guarantee organic integrity and reassure consumers.

The National Organic Program, which has never sent an auditor to China to make even one site visit, recently disclosed in an interview with the Des Moines Register that it will make surprise visits to organic farming and processing operations in China and check the records of several of the USDA-accredited certifiers operating there.

It has been little short of irresponsible to allow nearly five years to go by without having some kind of official on-site surveillance of the activities of USDA-accredited certifiers working in China. Barbara Robinson, the Agricultural Marketing Service official who supervises the NOP, has consistently resisted suggestions that there was any need to send auditors to China. Her response has been that the NOP has not received any complaints that would require an on-site visit.

The NOP did not disclose what kind of information had been acquired by the on-site surveillance is enough to form an unexpected turnaround. It is unclear how much of a surprise the publicized visits will be or whether they are a response to recent disturbing press reports about Chinese food imports, pressure from the organic trade, U.S. consumers have to rely on. It’s not surprising, then, that there is growing concern within the organic sector worldwide about reports of fraudulent organic products moving in world trade and the need to strengthen the quality assurance chain. The need to identify and deal with the most common risks was among the issues discussed in May at an international fraud prevention roundtable in Beijing, attended by FDA, USDA, certifiers, authorities, and others. China was included on a short list of countries described as problematic.

Wal-Mart’s announcement earlier this year that it is moving aggressively into organic food retailing has helped focus critical media attention on China’s organic sector. A senior USDA economist with organic expertise has been quoted as saying polluted water and air and contaminated soil, among other things, makes it “almost impossible to grow truly organic food in China.” Recent reports of soot from Chinese industry being carried across the Pacific Ocean and dropping on San Francisco seem to support this statement.

**China’s Impact on Organic Premiums**

The availability of cheap organic imports from China and its possible adverse impact on organic price premiums received by U.S. organic farmers is a continuing concern. This has led some to suggest these low prices may be due in part to questions about the quality of inspection and certification in China and the level of compliance with NOP standards.

However China’s reliance on well-known international inspection and certification bodies, including those accredited by the NOP, has helped make it a reliable supplier of organic tea, dry beans, rice, and vegetables. China is a major source of organic ingredients in Europe and a new report concludes Chinese companies now supply more than a third of the organic soybeans used by European processors.

Recent warnings of a possible flood of cheap Chinese organic exports flowing into this country seem somewhat overblown. Although no official numbers are available, the Chinese organic sector is quite small in comparison to organic sectors here and in other organic food importing countries. A recent report by a German company that organizes international trade fairs estimated Chinese organic food exports are growing at a rate of about 5 percent per year and account for about 5 percent of the global organic food market.

The U.S. government is cloudless about how much organic food is imported from China. The Department of Commerce uses hundreds of 10-digit codes to track and report imports. But there is no code to identify organic products. As a result both the USDA and the Commerce Department lack information on how much organic food is imported, whether it is soybeans or something else, or its country of origin. Organic food imports pass through the Food and Drug Administration’s failing system that inspects only one percent of food imports.

There was no organic sector in China prior to 1994. The first organic inspection in China, which involved a European certifier and a tea farm and processing center, did not take place until 1996. The Nanjing-based Organic Food Develop Center, the first Chinese certifier to receive international attention and support, was established in 1994 by China’s State Environmental Protection Agency. It has had a working relationship with OCIA for 10 years or more.

China’s organic sector has government support and is expanding rapidly in northeast and coastal provinces. The recent announcement in Beijing that China has 12 percent of the world’s organic-managed land may well be an inflated figure. Most of the organic food produced for export is grown on large-scale farms where farmers who know little or nothing about organic farming are organized and managed by private companies or by local governments that control access to state-owned farmland.

**Unique Challenges**

The challenges faced by international organic inspectors in dealing with a system that is heavily influenced by politics and is much different from the organic farming structure here and in Europe have been documented by Prof. Paul Thiers of Washington State University, a fluent Chinese speaker who researched the evolution of the organic farming sector in China in the 1990s, his comments emphasize the unusual problems foreign inspectors face.

“While conflict of interest problems on the part of foreign inspectors themselves may be lessened, problems of deception, manipulation and denial of access are more acute given the cultural, language, and political barriers,” he reported in a talk in Seattle. “Inspectors who are unclear if they are in a village or a township, who do not anticipate the revocation of land tenure contracts, or who do not understand the difference between a mayor and a party secretary are at a distinct disadvantage in anticipating the effects of self-interest and institutional structure on behavior.”

NOP auditors checking compliance in China face similar challenges. They must be aware of conflict of interest issues resulting from influence on the organic sector of local governments that run their own organic farms with peasants with little or no knowledge of organic farming. They must recognize the influence on independent organic companies of local officials who control access to land. They must assess organic safeguards in a country with the world’s highest pesticide use. And they must respond to conditions in a country notorious for failure to embrace international food safety norms and enforce food safety regulations.

U.S. consumers, organic businesses, and organic farmers alike are relying on NOP-accredited certifiers operating in China to fully comply with the provisions of the Organic Foods Production Act and they expect NOP auditors to make certain they do. In a global economy, the government’s duty to protect consumers extends to the performance of all certifiers operating in foreign food imports. The government owes all of us no less.

Roger Blobaum is an agricultural consultant specializing in organic agriculture and sustainable agriculture organizations and institutions. Comments on this analysis can be directed to rblobaum@msn.com. This article was originally published in the September/October 2007 issue of the Organic Broadcaster, published by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI 54767. www.mosesorganic.org
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**Calendar**

**January 16, 17, 18, 22 & 23**: Leominster, MA, NOFA-5 Day Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care, for more info: www.organiclandcare.net or (978) 724-0108

**Saturday, January 19**: 21st Annual NOFA/Mass Winter Conference, Bancroft School, Worcester MA, for more info: http://www.nofamass.org/conferences/w2008/index.php or contact Jassy Bratko, at jassyhighmeadow@yahoo.com or 978-928-5646

**January 23, 24, 25, 28, 29**: New Haven, CT, NOFA-5 Day Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care, for more info: www.organiclandcare.net or 203-888-5146


**Saturday, January 26**: NOFA-NJ’s Winter Conference “Greener Fields, Greener Pastures: Growing for Good Health”, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. for more info: Connie E. Deetz, 609-737-6848 or www.nofanj.org

**February 1, 2**: Groundhog Day Farmers’ Market, Second Congregational Church at 16 Court Square in Greenfield, MA, for more info: see www.dayofcoalflood.com/winter/saturday or contact Fredre Chin-Yee at 413-665-2041 or fredre@gmail.com

**February 9**: CT NOFA’s Community Farming Conference, New Haven, CT, for more info: call 203-888-5146 or visit www.ctnofa.org.

**February 16**: CT NOFA’s Getting Started in Organic Farming Conference, New Haven, CT, for more info: call 203-888-5146 or visit www.ctnofa.org.

**February 16th and Sunday, February 17th**: NOFA-VT Winter Conference, Vermont Technical College in Randolph, VT, for more info: Meg Klepack, 802-434-4122

**February 27, 28, 29, and March 3, 4**: URI Coastal Institute in Narragansett, RI, NOFA 5-Day Accreditation Course in Organic Land Care, for more info: www.organiclandcare.net

**Saturday March 1**: NOFA-NH Winter Conference, Winnisquam Regional High School in Tilton NH, for more info: www.nofanh.org

**Saturday March 8**: Cooking for Life: A Natural Whole Foods Cooking Workshop, Pfeiffer Center, Chestnut Ridge, NY, for more info: www.pfeiffercenter.org

**Saturday March 8**: NOFA’s Cultivating an Organic Connectestic Conference, Windsor, CT, for more info: call 203-888-5146 or visit www.ctnofa.org.

**Saturday March 8**: Natick Community Organic Farm’s “Maple Magic” celebration, for more info: 508-655-2204
Edwin (Pito) Santana weeds broccoli on Many Hands Organic Farm in Barre, Massachusetts. This issue contains news, features, and articles about growing in the Northeast, plus a special supplement on Labor on Organic Farms.