

The Natural Farmer

Summer Conference Planned for August 8 - 11

By Steve Lorenz

A history lesson was one of the orders of the day the last time the NOFA Summer Conference committee met, and it was that organically-evolving discussion which is foremost on my mind as I write this article for the wider NOFA Community. As with any yearly conference that has added and subtracted organizers from time to time, there are folks on the committee with varying NOFA conference experience, and thus a gap in understanding about how the conference has evolved over the years.

The germane fact for this context, and from which emerged one of our (in some cases, renewed) tasks, is that the Massachusetts chapter of NOFA has planned and hosted the summer event for the last 15 years. What this means is that maybe on some level this event has over the years taken on more of a Massachusetts flavor than a Northeast one, or it has been perceived that way.

Although we at NOFA/Mass want to continue hosting this conference at Hampshire College, we want the event to fully reflect the contributions and unique talents of NOFA members from all seven states (and beyond). The goal is to continue to have an innovative, vital, and growing conference and that can only happen if every aspect of the conference reflects our entire geographic area.

In regard to the coming summer conference we hope to do this by using the talents of presenters from all 7 states, attracting more crafters and homesteaders to sell their wares during the Saturday afternoon Fair, having more demonstrators during the fair and throughout the weekend, giving farmers from all seven states the chance to sell their produce to us for the local-only meal, inviting the musically and theatrically inclined in our full NOFA community to show their talents during the fair and throughout the weekend, and responding to your ideas about how to better reflect our geographic diversity. Although we recognize this may not be feasible, we also want to reiterate that any NOFA member can be part of the Summer Conference Committee, and in so doing, can come to some or all meetings (in Massachusetts) and/or be involved in conference coordination by e-mail or phone.



**The 2002 Summer Conference logo, by
Chris Rawlings**

Calling all organic farmers: Dre Rawlings is doing her best to put together a scrumptious “as local as we can get it” meal on Saturday evening. If you would like to sell your produce at market value to the NOFA conference for this purpose, and you’ll be able to deliver it to the conference site, please call Dre at (413) 628-0055 or email her at drechris@crocker.net.

Homesteaders, crafters, and others: Do you have homemade preserves, soaps, jewelry, herbal products, or other creations you’d like to sell? Sign up for a table at Saturday afternoon’s new and improved farmers’ and crafters’ market. We are also looking for people to demonstrate their craft. For more information, contact fair organizer Michael Faber at (413) 528-4387 or e-mail him at mfaber5@yahoo.com.

As you can tell, a very exciting conference is taking shape, and you’ll absolutely want to be a part of it. Those who are fans of Joel Salatin’s four books from Chelsea Green or are enticed by his pre-conference workshop series will want to return their registration forms as soon as they get them. The pre-conference, new this year, is titled “Plant/Animal Relationships in Food Production” and will immerse participants in all aspects of Salatin’s integrated systems approach to farming. The first 200 people to sign up will be treated to an 8-hour 2 part workshop on Thursday afternoon August 8th and Friday morning August 9th. It will require coming a day earlier, of course, but with the breadth of information to be covered it will be well worth it. Children’s activities will be planned for Thursday afternoon and Friday morning, standard Hampshire meals will be available for purchase, and Farmer Dan (Kaplan’s) band will entertain us Thursday evening. There will not be exhibits during the pre-conference, nor will there be a food court.

Although there has been and will continue to be considerable energy going into this inaugural pre-conference, those unable to attend the pre-conference will not be disappointed with the main event. First, as always, wonderful workshops await you. Second, Joel Salatin will be there for you, also. The author of the very popular Family Friendly Farming and other titles, he will deliver the keynote address on Friday night and conduct a marketing workshop on Saturday morning. After the lively look at Families and Farming in the last issue of The Natural Farmer, it will be nice to glean some good advice and inspiration from Salatin in the flesh.

On the topic of families, the children’s conference and teen conference staff have also been busy securing some new, exciting workshops. Watch for those in the next issue or consult your registration form when it arrives. Also, as a kickoff for the Saturday afternoon fair, we are planning a Grand Parade complete with puppets, masks, and streamers and whatever else we dream up. Children’s conference participants will spend part of Saturday morning and afternoon decorating and planning for the parade, and then we’ll bring the pomp and circumstance to everyone at the conference. If you have any ideas or would like to be a part of the parade planning, contact Justine Johnson or Steve Lorenz at (413) 527-1920 or johnsonlorenz@charter.net.

The parade will be a raucous beginning to what we hope to be a great fair. Festive is what we are looking for, and in order to achieve that we believe we need to have music and dancing. We are in the process of trying to book some musicians for during the fair, but we also would love to have some impromptu playing and jamming. So if you play the fiddle but never told anyone or you’ve let your mandolin gather dust in the corner for too long now, or if nothing makes you smile like when you play your ukulele or tuba or drum, please bring your instruments! Also, if you and some others have a barn band or you know of another group which would fit in well with the fair crowd, please call Michael Faber and let him know what you’re thinking (413) 528-4387.

As always food will be a centerpiece of the conference whether you're partaking of the meals in the Hampshire College dining hall or you're breezing by the food court under the main tents. Most people truly loved Dre Rawlings' menu last year, and at present she is planning some equally delectable items. As for the food court, Bernard Kirchner is looking to diversify the selections a bit and would love if someone gave him a heads up about a great restaurant or small food business who could benefit from the exposure of being at the conference and make simple, wholesome meals (and a bit of money). You can call Bernard at (413) 229-3306.

Fine people of NOFA, you can tell we're definitely looking for improvement, innovation and growth at this year's Summer Conference, but we know we must also butter our bread well, too. For example, we spent a good portion of time at the last committee meeting debating the merits of debating and what the topic of this year's debate should be. Any ideas? Call Jack Kittredge (978) 355-2853 or email him at jackkitt@aol.com. The conference will be better for such discussions, we think. Richard "The Entertainer" Murphy has dotted I's and crossed T's to make sure the conference will be fun as well as informative: A contradance, a zydeco band, a family storyteller, good food, wine, and beer all await you. But, if you can think of any films you think he should get a hold of, please call him at (508) 867-5735. Also, if you can help in any of the areas mentioned above or have any other ideas for the conference, please let us know. Otherwise, just mark your calendars for August 8-11.