

Women, Food & Agriculture Network

Volume 1, Number 1
February 1998

How We Started

The Women, Food and Agriculture Network here in Iowa is just beginning its formative organizational efforts, yet its roots are planted in relationships and events that go back five years. Here is the story by Denise O'Brien who has been the primary motivator for both our organizational efforts and future visions.

by Denise O'Brien

I met Kathy Lawrence in September 1993. That was the beginning of a vision for the Women, Food and Agriculture Network. Kathy participated in the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992 and helped formulate the resolutions about farmers and sustainable agriculture. We met later in Mulhiem, Germany at a follow-up meeting to the Earth Summit and have been friends ever since.

Kathy knew how the United Nations operated and was aware of a number of international conferences that would take place between 1993 and 1997. In particular, we began to look toward the 4th World Conference on Women in China in 1995. As the agenda began to unfold for the Conference, Kathy noticed that there was no working group around the issue of food production. She realized that in order to have an impact on the Platform for Action, the official document that the World Conference on Women would produce, there needed to be a group of people to work on the issue of food. Thus was formed the Women, Food and Agriculture Working Group.

Kathy knew me as an organic farmer interested in international issues and furthering women's position in agriculture.

We started working on input into the Platform for Action. Both Kathy and I knew quite a few women farmers working on issues of food, but there was no "list" or network from which to draw participants. I had formerly worked at PrairieFire Rural Action directing a project called Rural Women's Leadership Development, but once I left PrairieFire the project died.

Over the next year of work it became apparent that a network needed to be formed. The more women we talked to, the more interest emerged. We held informal gatherings at meetings we attended and were able to collect input into the process leading up to the Conference.

In September of 1995, Kathy and I traveled to China for the Conference under the auspices of Women, Food and Agriculture and sponsored a two week workshop, "The Globalization of Agriculture." We worked with women from all over the world and began to see how women in other countries were joining together to work on issues of food production, sustainable agriculture and women's role in agriculture.

Upon returning from China, Kathy

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Mission

The *Women, Food, and Agriculture Network* links and amplifies women's voices on issues of food systems, sustainable communities and environmental integrity.

Calendar

January 29 - March 29, 1998: "Rural Cultures: Japan and Iowa." Blanden Memorial Art Museum, 920 Third Ave. South, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-4723.

Exhibit features over one hundred 15th through 19th century examples of weaving, dying, metalwork, woodwork, ceramic, quilts, basketwork, and paper-making. Lecture programs offered throughout Feb - April. Contact Blanden Memorial Art Museum 515-573-2316.

February 18, 1998: Hearing on Organic Rules. Ames, Iowa, Iowa State Center, Scheman Building, Benton Auditorium - Suite 4. Contact 515-294-3218, or Karen Thomas at 202-720-3252.

Feb. 20 -21, 1998: National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Annual Meeting. Washington, DC. Phone 515-270-2634; e-mail: ncrlic@aol.com

March is Women's History Month.

March 5 - 7, 1998: Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference. UNO, Peter Kiewit Center, Omaha, NE. Contact Rita Shaughnessy, 402-495-2355; email: pedagogy@ccs.unomaha.edu.

June 28-July 2, 1998: The 2nd World Conference on Women in Agriculture, Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, DC. For more information, contact USDA, Jill Long Thompson at 202-720-4581 or email Leanne.Powell@ usda.gov.

July 9, 1998: Dialog with Women Labor Activists. Waterloo. Sponsored by Un. of Iowa Labor Center. For more information, contact Denise O'Brien, 712-243-5752.

Resources

Gender In Rural Areas

Gender In Rural Areas (GIRA) is an electronic network for either researchers or interested participants on issues of gender in rural society. To subscribe, send to: majordomo@metz.une.edu.au. Leave the subject line blank and in the body of the message, type: subscribe.

Organic Agriculture Worldwide/ IFOAM Directory
c/o Okozentrum Imsbach
D-6636 Tholey-Theley, Germany
Email: IFOAM@t-online.de

Website: <http://ecoweb.dk/ifoam>

The directory of International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) contains all the addresses, phone and fax numbers, and other relevant information, on key activities, plus logos of IFOAM member organizations and corporate associates. About 500 organic agriculture contacts in about 95 countries all over the world are listed. This useful networking tool opens many doors to the world of organic agriculture and can be ordered from the IFOAM General Secretariat at the address above. Price: US\$ 16 (plus postage). Do not send money or check. They will send an invoice with your directory.

Wanted

Wanted: Insight, connections, and encouragement for the transformation of an idea into reality.

The farm I live on has two houses. The one my family lives in and a smaller house that has been waiting to discover its calling. We are just beginning to develop this second house as a retreat. We see this as a fitting compliment to our existing CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation. We would like it to provide experiential opportunities for sustainable living.

The opportunities we name first include the time and space a retreat facility provides, the connection to the earth through the rural setting, the farm operation, and the adjacent wetland. The size is conducive for individuals or small groups. There's capacity for kitchenette facilities. We've considered marketing through friends, women's groups, and churches. I would like this to be a resource to meet some needs of local groups as well as a broader audience.

At this point, I hope to accomplish basic remodeling this spring before I get swamped with field work. The intent is to use input from early users in the fuller development of this facility, and not to over-develop it now.

We could use your insights toward fitting the idea pieces together. What would you find valuable in such a facility? What counsel do you have to offer?

Please send any suggestions to: Jan Libbey, 1465 120th St., Kanawha, Iowa 50447 or e-mail: libland@kalnet.com.

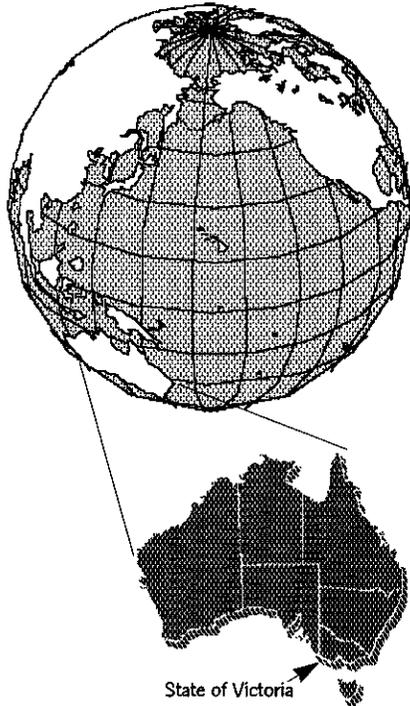
Women, Food and Agriculture Network

This newsletter is published by the *Women, Food and Agriculture Network*, a Tides Center Project with the help of the Stanley Foundation, Muscatine, Iowa, and Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. We welcome input, stories, and news from your part of the world. Our emphasis is organic agriculture, but we are interested in women's lives, relationships, communities and family.

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The Rural Women's Movement in Australia



with groups of women.

One consequence of this early outreach was the realization of the need for rural women to come together in order to talk about their concerns for their families, communities and industries. As a result, an annual Rural Women's Gathering was initiated and conducted for the first time in 1986. A watershed event, this gathering now rotates across rural communities thereby sharing the workload and increasing accessibility for women across the state. These gatherings provided an important opportunity for women to share their experiences, learn new skills, meet with politicians, and develop a sense of belonging. This concept has since been adopted by the other Australian states.

Rural women are not an homogeneous group. They have significantly different aspirations for themselves, their families, community and industry. This diversity means that women express interest at different times and in different ways. It is important that the diversity is acknowledged and embraced; with an on-going commitment to support women at all stages of their life's journey.

Women's Organizations Formed in 1994

As a consequence of the new state networks and as a result of the International Women in Agriculture Conference, an Australian Women in Agriculture organization was established in 1994. This organization has strong local roots. It has enabled a national 'snapshot' of rural women's issues to be defined - with state and national policy makers being kept informed.

A Foundation for Women in Agriculture has also been established and is providing funds to assist women in undertaking projects and research. More recently the federal government has established a Rural Women's Unit to further the work of the states and provide a federal resource.

Increasing awareness of women's role, has been accompanied by a realization at an industry level, that women are under-represented on all policy and administrative bodies. New develop-

ments have considered the barriers to women's involvement on advisory organizations, policy, planning and decision making bodies. These barriers include - a personal lack of confidence; traditional male attitudes and paternalistic rural culture; lack of role models; the time, distance and cost of attending meetings; and a lack of suitable child care. Women have always made, and continue to make, contributions in all aspects of rural life and development. What is new is that commodity groups are now acknowledging their failure to embrace women as a community and industry resource.

Industries Implementing Programs for Women

Commencing with the Dairy Industry Project in 1995, the grains, fishing, wool and pig industries are now implementing specific projects to enhance the capacity of women by providing both personal development and leadership skills to better equip them in their family, community and industry involvement. The attitudinal changes over the past two years is encouraging, as more industry leaders realize that to be internationally competitive; all human resources - but especially those of women - need to be embraced and utilized across the diversity of roles which can be filled.

Many of the issues and concerns of Australian rural women - the concept of 'get big or get out' in farming; care for the environment; quality, 'clean' food; and the need for an alternative 'wisdom based' leadership style - are the same issues challenging women of the United States and other countries throughout the world. International forums and networks which enable women to share their dreams, strategies, successes and learning will both expedite the process of positive change and heighten a global sense of community. t

(Cheryl Phillips, Community Development Consultant, Mooroopna, Australia, 244 Echuca Road, Mooroopna. 3629 Australia; tel: 011 61 3 251233 or Changing Communities Inc., 620 Briarstone Drive, C-34, Mason City, IA 50401; tel: 515-421-0417)

by Cheryl Phillips

The first rural women's state network within Australia celebrated its Tenth Anniversary during 1996. It was established at a time of increased physical and emotional stress rural women were experiencing in the face of the financial crises and natural disasters of the early '80's. The state of Victoria's Department of Agriculture undertook a consultation at this time to identify the major issues confronting women and then prepared a proposal to the state government. This led to the first Rural Women's Network - which has now been replicated across Australia.

The concept was a simple one - funding was provided by the state to enable women to share their stories, contacts and resources through a quarterly newsletter. Additionally, the government provided funding for a coordinator to act as editor for this newsletter and to work

How We Started

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needed to find work and joined Just Food, an organization working on food systems in New York City. I then continued to work on Women, Food and Agriculture on my own.

In 1996 I was contacted by three women working to plan a rural women's workshop at the World Food Summit in Rome, Italy in November 1996. Under the name of Women, Food and Agriculture, I helped raise money, formulate the workshop agenda and found two women from the United States to attend. Again, as the work unfolded, I found it difficult to work without a network.

In February 1997 I attended the Women's Gathering sponsored by Practical Farmers of Iowa at Springbrook State Park. It was here that a few of us decided to continue to work together to formalize a network of women in Iowa.

The group, Betty Wells, Danielle Wirth, Virginia Wadsley, Shelly Gradwell, Rhonda Yoder and I met in western Iowa at the end of March, 1997, to work on grant writing. We met again in May and increased our numbers. It was in May that we decided to have a three day workshop in July entitled "Rural Women, the Economy and the Environment." The turn out was great, and we felt we were on our way.

In the meantime grants were being written, and contact with more women was gaining strength. In October we met again and worked out a mission statement, goals and objectives. These times of getting together have also had a social aspect to them. The October meeting was close to Halloween and we had a fun night dressed in costume.

In November Women, Food and Agriculture Network was granted \$4,500 by the Iowa Women's Foundation to be used for salary, workshops, scholarships and promotion. In December we were informed that the Tides Center in San Francisco would accept us as a project thus coming under their non-profit status. This will allow us to receive grant money to do the work of our mission: to link and amplify women's voices on issues of food systems, sustainable communities and environmental integrity. t

I Am of Here

by Jan Libby

(This is a paraphrased piece I wrote trying to capture the emotions of a 70 plus year-old friend who has grown up and lived her whole life in Lincoln township in Wright county. Now surrounded by DeCoster facilities, her neighbors suggest she just move to town. She says she can't. The piece attempts to get at why)

I am of here.

Here is of me.

When I stand on the land,
I feel myself as a brush stroke
of the earth swept into my being.

My life and family are a groundswell
of this place.

It has raised us, formed us.
Our life's rhythm breathes with the
rhythm of the land.

I am of here.

This land is alive.

I feel it in the wind that kisses me
with spring's awakenings,
warms me deeply with
summer's intensity
and nips me
with winter's sharp edge.

I feel it with the people that are my
family far beyond my family.

I am of here.

Here is of me.

Public Response Requested on Organic Rules

by Pamela Neenan, Coordinator, Organic Agriculture Program, Iowa Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, tel.: 515-281-5783, fax: 515-281-6236

Nearly eight years after passing of the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) in the 1990 Farm Bill, the proposed rules for organic standards have been published by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). They detail the specific criteria which must be met by producers, processors and handlers who want to label their product "organic."

The OFPA and its rules will allow producers and handlers to act under a national set of standards. Currently, there exist over 40 different sets of standards by which the term "organic" is used. The national standard will also require import products to meet US standards.

Issues Needing Comment

Many of the issues on which the USDA is asking for comment are still unresolved in the organic industry itself. For example, some organic processors have requested the allowance of certain genetically engineered organisms such as chymosin, an enzyme used in cheese production.

The review of organic livestock care has revealed a great deal of differing opinions on the use of antibiotics. And there remains debate about what synthetic substances might be allowed in production or in handling.

The USDA is under considerable pressure to present standards that are based on industry standards, market demand and scientific evidence. It must justify the standards it is proposing not only to the organic industry but to several diverse agencies in the US government.

It is important for the industry to come to consensus on as many issues as possible. If consensus is not reached, then the USDA is left to make the best judgment it is able to make. The USDA has responded to the organic industry's request for national regulation; now it must serve in the role of mediator as well.

If you would like to comment on the proposed rule, be sure to base your argument on your own farming or handling

experience as well as documented evidence. Cite agricultural, policy, technical or scientific facts. Make your criticism constructive, ask for what you want as well as what you don't want and be sure to include compliments as well.

Remember that this is a "living" document which can represent a pivotal change in agriculture. A system of agriculture is being defined by a national government which encourages the reduction of synthetic substances in food production and processing. More importantly, this system promotes the health of the agroecosystem and encompasses long-term soil health, biodiversity, and recycling.

Proposed Rules

The proposed rules can be found on the USDA National Organic Program homepage:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>.

They may also be found in the December 16, 1997 Federal Register in your local library.

Make Your Opinions Known

The USDA will be accepting comments from the public until May 1, 1998. You may send your comments through the Internet or in writing to: Eileen Stommes, Deputy Administrator, USDA-AMS-TM-NOP, Rm. 4007-S, Ag Stop 0275, PO Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456.

Iowa is one of four states in which the USDA will hold a public comment meeting. This meeting will be held on Feb. 18 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Benton Auditorium, Scheman Building, Iowa State University in Ames. Mike Hankin, Director of the National Organic Program, USDA will preside over this public comment meeting.

**February 18, Ames, Iowa
Iowa State Center
Scheman Building,
Benton Auditorium - Suite 4
(515) 294-3218**

The USDA has specifically asked the public to provide comments in several areas:

1) whether the use of genetically engineered organisms should be permitted, prohibited or allowed on a case-by-case basis;

2) whether toxins derived from genetically engineered bacteria should be allowed, prohibited or approved on a case-by-case basis;

3) the conditions under which non-organic feed may be used in organic livestock;

4) whether the USDA should allow practices that restrict the available space for movement or access to outdoors for organic livestock (as in emergency or unanticipated circumstances and site-specific soil, climate, animal health, or other environmental factors);

5) use of animal drugs in organic livestock particularly antibiotics (sub-therapeutic antibiotics are not proposed; these are prohibited under the OFPA);

6) whether the use of ionizing radiation is compatible under an organic system and if not, what are effective alternatives to ionizing radiation (such as sanitary practices, heat pasteurization and incidental additives);

7) what synthetic substances may be allowed for handlers (only those allowed in production or others);

8) whether the use of biosolids (sewage sludge) should be prohibited or allowed; and

9) whether the current limitation of \$5,000 in income for producers for exemption from certification should be raised to \$10,000 or another amount.

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Women, Food and Agriculture Network

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We are a network of women with food, agricultural, and economic concerns.
Please share your thoughts, ideas, successes, interests, and solutions with us.

Add my name to your newsletter list. I have the following to contribute

I am interested in becoming active. _____

Name _____

Organization _____
(if you are joining as a representative of a group)

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Please mail this form to: **Women, Food & Agriculture**

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