

Women, Food & Agriculture Network



The mission of the Women Food and Agriculture Network was established on October 28, 1997 at a retreat in St. Thomas Moore Center for All Seasons, Panora, Iowa. After accepting the final wording of the mission, a large list of specific goals was considered in an extended brain-storming session. In order to combine, simplify, and work on language, a committee met on December 12 to draft a final list for consideration by the full group. These were presented to the group meeting on March 27, 1998, in Boone (Iowa) Scenic Valley Conference Center where they were approved with consensus after further discussion and some revision. Following is the result. These will govern the Women, Food and Agriculture Network in their work through this year.

Mission

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

Goals

1. To promote sustainable agricultural and community structures.
2. Insist on social and ecological justice for current and future human and non-human communities.

3. Provide opportunities for education on economics and environment that
 - articulate a holistic view of agriculture,
 - instill a sense of place, and
 - draw forward useful experiences from the past.
4. Create networks that
 - support communities of growers, consumers, workers and others who strive for sustainability;
 - increase effective access to and use of existing resources;
 - engage participants in experiential learning;
 - provide safe places for self-expression; and
 - respect the spirituality of the land and people.
5. Advocate change by exploring alternatives and challenge
 - the globalization of economies,
 - cultures of domination and institutionalized discrimination,
 - the disintegration of landscapes, and
 - oppressive conceptual frameworks.

(If you are interested in taking part in the Women, Food and Agriculture, send in the form on the back of this newsletter.)

Mission

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

Calendar



June 13, 1998: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Buffalo Days, Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge/Prairie Learning Center. Learn about the buffalo that once dominated North America's prairies. Interpretive talks, hikes, and tours through the bison enclosure. Write PO Box 399, Prairie City, IA 50228.

June 19-21, 1998:

Midwest Renewable Energy Fair, Portage County Fairgrounds-Amherst, Wisconsin, featuring Ralph Nader on Saturday, June 20th at 1:30 p.m. The fair offers hundreds of workshops, speakers, and exhibits on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Events for children, educators, and the general public; alternative vehicle showcase; tours of renewable energy homes; on site model home tour, food and entertainment. Contact MREA, PO Box 249, Amherst, WI 54406; 715-824-5166; fax: 715-824-5399; website: www.msn.fullfeed.com/~hulet/

June 28-July 2, 1998:

The Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture, Washington, DC. Contact The President's Interagency Council on Women, U.S. Dept. of State, 2201 C street, NW, Rm 2906, Washington, DC 20520; 202-647-6227; webpage: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/iacw/index.html>.

July 21-22, 1998:

Next Retreat for the Women, Food and Agriculture Network group. Mt. Vernon, IA. If interested, contact Denise O'Brien, 712-243-5752 or Betty Wells, 515-294-1104.

July 23-24, 1998:

Churches and Land Issues: Convocation for Discernment and Action '98, Social, Economic, Spiritual Concerns, Sinsinawa Wisconsin (10 miles from Dubuque). Call Miriam Brown at 608-748-4411 or Laura Krouse at 319-895-6924.

August 3-5, 1998:

Positively Iowa, 1st Annual Iowa Rural Congress. A new grassroots effort designed to present a common voice for rural Iowa. Contact Marshalltown Community College, 3700 South Center Street, Marshalltown, IA 50158; 515-752-7106 x227; email: posiowa@iavalley.cc.ia.us.

News Briefs

Update on Organic Rules

According to a news release dated May 8, the "U.S. Department of Agriculture will make fundamental revisions to its proposed national organic standards as a result of the 200,000 comments USDA received on the initial proposal."

This means there will be a revised proposal before final draft is accepted. It also means that comments made by organic farmers around the country have made a significant impact on the process.

"The bulk of the extraordinary number of comments opposed including the products of biotechnology, the use of irradiation in food processing, and the application of biosolids (municipal sludge) in organic food production."

Glickman said, "Therefore, these products and practices will not be included in our revised proposal, and food produced with these products and practices will not be allowed to bear the organic label."

Resources

Guide to USDA and Other Federal Resources for Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry Enterprises. FREE. This Guide lists and gives basic information about well over 70 federal programs that can be helpful to farmers, small entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations, rural communities and those in the sustainable agriculture movement. Contact Margaret Krome, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, 2524 Chamberlain Ave., Madison, WI 53705; 608-238-1440; fax: 608-238-1569.

A Time to Act, A Report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms. Call 202-720-0122 and ask for MP-1545 or write USDA, Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013. (See review page 7.)

A Better Way to Raise Hogs. This video, produced by the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, NE, illustrates the changes occurring in how hogs are raised, who is raising them, and what it means for family farmers and rural communities. 45-minutes long, \$10. Call Rita at 402-846-5428, or send request to Center for Rural Affairs, PO Box 406, Walthill, NE 68067.

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 suggestions, stories, and news from your part of the world. Our emphasis is organic agriculture, but we are interested in women's lives and their relationships, communities and family.

Address: RR 2, Box 79
Atlantic, IA 50022
712-243-5752

Newsletter Production:

Denise O'Brien

(hnob@nishna.net)

Katy Hansen

(katywhansen@igc.org)

Sow Seeds of Generosity, Plant a Row for the Hungry

by Nan Bonfils

Home gardeners all across the country are pledging a row to feed the poor and I am inviting you to do the same. This service project, initiated by the Garden

Writers Association of America, is designed to move durable produce to appropriate soup kitchens and food pantries. There's no cash involved, just you and your garden, and some folks in your community who need fresh food.

Think about it as you tend your vegetable garden this spring. Don't feel obliged to literally plant an extra row to give away. Just keep the commitment in your head and in your heart that any excess produce will go to the right

place. And mark your commitment with a special Plant a Row for the Hungry garden marker available from Full Circle Farm.

It's my second summer at Full Circle Farm and I am committed to Plant a Row for the Hungry (sometimes referred to by its managers as PAR).

Initially the program appealed to me primarily as a sensible solution to that perpetual harvest problem of too many Romas (or green beans or squash or whatever).

Iowan by marriage, I started vegetable gardening later in life than most of my neighbors. Four years ago I had only a 50% survival rate in my patch of Romas. The next year, fearing another winter of salsa deprivation, I planted twice as many tomato plants and every one of them thrived.

My neighbors, all being adequately supplied from their own gardens, declined my gifts of Romas and left me harvesting, canning, drying, and freezing tomatoes till I found myself tossing per-

fectly fine vegetables directly into the compost pile. The whole time I just knew someone must be longing for that food. So when Plant a Row for the Hungry put me in contact with my nearest food pantry, I was relieved and satisfied.

Mere satisfaction has become something closer to passion this year as I've discovered more about the nature of hunger in this country of ours, with its record breaking stock market and corporate highs. Hunger harries children, the elderly, and the working poor:

- 38% (or more than 8 million) of all emergency food recipients, served by the national network of food banks, are children.

- 1.1 million seniors skipped a meal last month because there was no food in the house.

- 21% of emergency food clients are employed—39% of all emergency client households have at least one adult who is working.

- Unemployment is at a 30 year low and more than ten million people have left the welfare rolls.

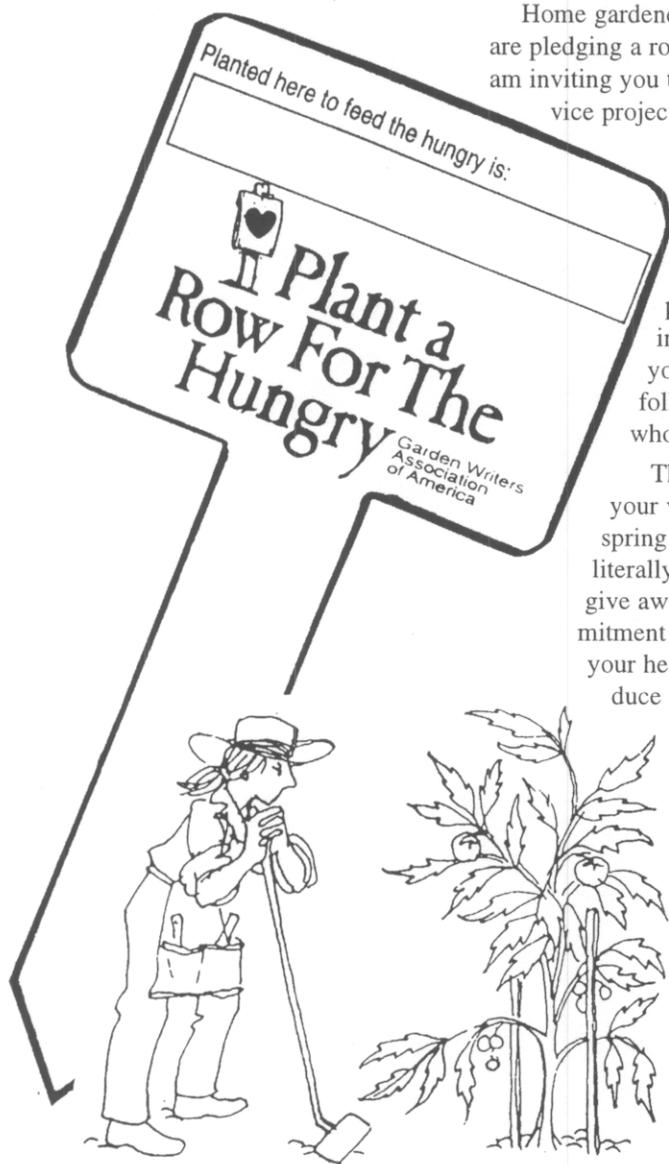
Yet hunger in America persists.

This year 1998 marks the 4th year for Plant a Row for the Hungry. Its success so far has emboldened its organizers to launch a Million for the Millennium campaign with a goal of a million pounds pledged and delivered by gardeners to food banks by the millennium. Ambitious? You bet. But possible. One woman, Joanie Jackson in San Jose California, organized growers to donate 35,000 pounds of produce in one season. I can certainly do my bit. So can you.

Sow seeds of generosity and have a golden summer.

(Nan Bonfils works two part time jobs for cash: Associate Director for the Iowa Arboretum and Program Assistant for Practical Farmers of Iowa. She is a farm wife for love.)

*(The facts cited in this article are from **Hunger 1997: The Faces & Facts** from Second Harvest, 116 South Michigan Ave Suite 4, Chicago, Illinois 60603-2303; 312-263-2303; fax: 312-263-5626; website: www.secondharvest.org.)*



Resources

For the address of your nearest Iowa food bank, you can call **Food Bank of Iowa** at 515-244-6555. For food banks across a broader geographic range, call **Second Harvest** at 312-263-2303 or **Foodchain** at 1-800-845-3008.

To obtain free Plant A Row for the Hungry garden markers, call **Full Circle Farm** at 515-795-3288. I'm hard to catch, but if you leave a clear message I will get back to you. You can also reach me by fax at 515-795-2619. For e-mail, use nanb@iastate.edu.

What is Community Food Security?



by Denise O'Brien

Community Food Security (CFS), just what does that mean? The formal definition is: "all persons obtaining at all times a culturally acceptable nutritionally adequate diet through local non-emergency sources." A CFS approach emphasizes the need to build community institutions to ensure access and availability for community residents. Food security must be seen as a question of community development and empowerment that complements and extends the traditional view of addressing hunger issues at the individual level.

Training in Des Moines

On April 3, 1998 several women from the Women, Food and Agriculture Network attended a training on local food security issues in Des Moines, Iowa. This meeting, along with eight others scheduled around the United States was sponsored by the Community Food Security Coalition. The Community Food Security Coalition was formed in 1994 with the goal of promoting comprehensive, community-based solutions to the nation's food and farming problems. It serves as a policy advocate at the federal and state levels, a technical assistance provider, a clearinghouse and catalyst for community food security programs, and a research and public education center.

Andy Fisher from the Community Food Security Coalition, Gail Feenstra from the University of California, and Jan O'Donnell of the Minnesota Food Association were the trainers. Topics explored were:

- creating collaborative projects
- developing entrepreneurial projects
- forming linkages between different sectors of the food system
- planning strategic and long-term goals
- building coalitions
- planning grants
- assessing community needs

Robert Karp of the Field to Family Community Food Security Project in Iowa, presented the work that this USDA project is hoping to accomplish in the next three years. Field to Family is a cen-

tral Iowa collaboration of local churches, social service organizations, community supported agriculture programs, businesses, sustainable agriculture organizations and Iowa State University that have come together to foster greater self-reliance in local food production and to help low-income families gain access to wholesome food through community-based involvement.

Movement for Self Reliance

There is a movement afoot in our country to use local food production and processing as a way to put new people on the land and build the rural economy. As so many agriculture states become more export-oriented and raise strictly corn and soybean crops, the farms have become larger and larger and less of the food on our table comes from our own county, state or even region.

(Denise O'Brien is a organic farmer from Atlantic, Iowa. She is interested in international and women's issues and has been the driving force behind the formation of the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network. See article on the formation of WFA in our last issues, February, 1998.)



Resources on

Community Food Security

Community Food Security: A Guide to Concept, Design and Implementation. Order from CFS, P.O. Box 209, Venice, CA 90294; 310-822-5410.

Proceedings of the Community Food Systems Conference: Sustaining Farms and People in the Emerging Economy. \$10.00 from UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, One Shields Ave., Davis CA 95616; 916-752-7556.

Community Food Systems in California: Profiles of 13

Collaborations, Publication 21574. \$6.00 from UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, UC DANR Communications Services, 6701 San Pablo Ave., Oakland, CA 94608-1239; 1-800-994-8849.

Community Supported Agriculture in Japan

by Denise O'Brien

In September 1997 several people from the Iwate Prefecture Cooperative in northern Japan visited Iowa to learn more about where and how soybeans are raised. They wanted to learn how Iowa supports its farmers and the effect of world trade agreements on Iowa's rural towns. Another concern they brought with them was the trend toward genetically altered soybeans and corn.

During their visit Shelly Gradwell arranged for them to visit a community-supported agriculture program and have a picnic with producers and consumers. Virginia Wadsley gave them a personal tour of Living History Farms. They were driven through the Iowa countryside to see how small towns and small farms were continuing. After the trip, they reported that they thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were incredibly surprised at how big Iowa seemed. They were also shocked and disappointed that there was very little opposition to genetically altered organisms (GMOs).

Invited to Japan

As a result of the visit, I was invited to Iwate Consumer's Cooperative to be the keynote speaker at their annual meeting in February. The Iwate Cooperative is one of 647 consumer cooperatives in Japan where they vary from retail coops supplying consumer products and services to housing, insurance and medical coops.

I spoke of a new vision of Iowa agriculture. I showed slides that Jan Libbey had provided from the Iowa Network of Community Agriculture. I was certain that the people would experience a different type of Iowa than the one they imagined. And, sure enough, during the question and answer period that followed, questions were asked as to how prevalent this particular practice was in Iowa and why it is being practiced. People were surprised when I told them that Iowa raises only 5% of the food we eat, that we import the remaining balance.

I learned much while in Japan. In food retailing, the coop philosophy in Japan is to provide a stable supply of "fresh and safe" food. Members of cooperatives are

environmentally conscious and support many movements that aim at improving life.

Direct Transactions Between Producers and Consumers

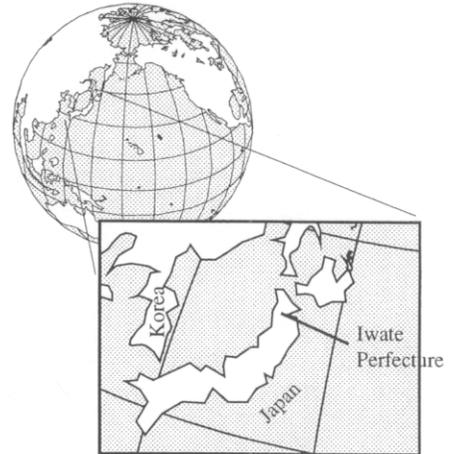
Sanchoku or the direct transactions between producers and consumers, is one method the coop movement has developed to meet not only the objective of providing fresh, safe food, but also other objectives related to support for Japanese agriculture. The essence of *sanchoku* is that it is a way of obtaining fresh produce directly from the producer, usually without the use of intermediaries. It also implies contact between the producer and the consumer.

The Iwate Coop was established in 1990 and has a very strong *sanchoku* base. The bulk of the *sanchoku* products are supplied by organizations or growers in Iwate Prefecture. As seasonal conditions prevent production all year round, products must be bought from other prefectures either through the public market or by arrangement with other consumer coops that have *sanchoku* agreements with producers in their area. Ninety percent of the meat, pork and chicken, 30% of the fruit and vegetables, and 10% of the fish are purchased through the *sanchoku* system.

Large Scale Farming is Having Negative Effect on Both Countries

It became very clear to me that the Japanese people I visited are very concerned about the disappearance of the small and medium size farms, the depopulation of the rural areas, and the loss of the culture that relates to food. We had many discussions about the situation both in the United States and in Japan. It was obvious that the emphasis on large-scale farming is having a negative effect on the rural areas of both of our countries.

The people of the cooperative were very interested in continuing exchanges between our countries in order to educate themselves first hand on problems and solutions that will benefit rural societies.



生
協
産
直

Sanchoku:
the direct transactions
between producers
and consumers

The Place We Called Home

by Jane Klocke

(The words in this poem came straight from my heart one evening as I evaluated my feelings about losing a very important part of my family's life. The Department of Transportation was taking our homestead and livelihood away from us without an ounce of human compassion. My life evolved around this small home and farm, and now it is all lost except for the memories I'll cherish forever.)

Decades ago, we would stop down to see
a place we'd call home to raise a family.
A haven to raise children, crops, livestock and flowers,
a place to boast about a farm we'd call ours.

The house was quite small, set on top of a hill,
five precious children -- the house we did fill.
Hard work and long hours -- the years sped by fast,
fond memories would linger, the mistakes they would pass.

Family and friends we would gather around
to relax near the tree in the shade on the ground.
The splendor of nature was at our front door,
on wet spring days, it tracked the clean floor.

The colors of amber, multitudes of green.
bountiful crops -- it was more than a dream.
I lay here this evening to ponder our future,
this project -- it seems a most hideous creature.

The Lord be my shepherd and help me get through,
to be patient, forgiving, and love as you do.

Bioregionalism is an Old Skill and a New Philosophy

by Danielle Wirth

The concept of bioregionalism is as old as human culture. Originally, indigenous people lived within the resources of their respective home ranges. These early people were keen observers of the local environments, able to identify and utilize local plants and animals for basic survival. Weather patterns and seasonal shifts were observed religiously, and this allowed local residents of these pristine environments to anticipate the migration of fish in the spring, ripening of fruit in the summer and fall, and the movement of herds in the transitional times.

Intimate knowledge of one's "home range" is not common knowledge to most members of contemporary modern society. We have become insulated and isolated from organic-based experiences. Weather fronts are more often viewed from the living room as Doppler radar maps on local TV weather stations. Few people today are able to judge the direction and condition of approaching weather fronts by watching cloud formation, movement of leaves and the *smell* of the earth.

Bioregionalism is an emerging philosophical tradition within western thought. While practiced by all people in an earlier time and known today by some thriving

local communities, it lacks widespread recognition in today's culture.

Those engaged in bioregionalist thought very often include practice as a strong part of the thought process. Many philosophies, while mentally agile and engaging, lack a practical behavior component. Not so for bioregionalism. Small, consensus-based societies are sprouting throughout North America. Local watersheds tend to be the defining boundaries. However, biotic shift (a change in vegetation), rainfall patterns, altitude, cultural nuances and unique landscape features can all define a bioregion.

When acting with a bioregional conscience, one is compelled to eat locally available food items while in season and storing/preserving foodstuffs for times when nature's bounty is resting or dormant. Trade between bioregions is not rejected, but practitioners insist that the trade is of benefit to the local economy while protecting the local environment. Also, the trade must not disadvantage other communities involved in the interaction. If we were to apply these standards to GATT and NAFTA, how would those negotiated agreements score? Not well, I fear.

In bioregionalism, organizing and taking action to protect the environment and

the economic and cultural quality of one's home turf is considered an act of citizenship. Given this standard, how might national media characterize young people who hug ancient trees to prevent them from becoming toilet paper, or family farmers fighting another factory farm? These actions, through a bioregionalist lens would be considered valiant and brave.

When acting to protect one's home place, we are moved by our deep relationship and partnership with the landscape that formed us and holds us. It is necessary in this global village, to keep your home soil safe and healthy. It is necessary to engage in truth-telling and sometimes confront myths which have disrupted people's ability to be grounded in their local landscapes. Truth-telling and constructive engagement will serve the human endeavor and the land well. I encourage Women, Food, and Agriculture Network supporters to do both.

(Danielle Wirth is a former federal park ranger who currently teaches environmental science and natural history at an Iowa community college. She is a local organic food activist and restorer of savannas.)

A Time to Act: Recommendations from the USDA Small Farm Commission

(exerted from an article in the Center for Rural Affairs Newsletter)

The National Commission on Small Farms was established last July by Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman to examine the status of small farms and recommend action to enhance their viability. It set about developing a public policy framework to reinvigorate family farming and increase opportunities on farms of modest investment, owned and operated by families who provide the majority of labor.

The commission report, *A Time to Act*, included the following conclusions:

Concentration and family farm decline are not inevitable. Nor do they result from "economies of size." Economic research presented to the Commission

documents that farms can capture the efficiencies associated with farm enlargement at a very modest scale of operation.

However, small farms do face a scale bias in public policy and markets. The Commission's 146 recommendations aim to correct the biases against small farms, generally defined as farms with sales of less than \$250,000 operated by families that own the production or own or lease the productive assets.

Although some recommendations call for additional federal spending, most do not. Rather, they seek effective implementation of policies designed to protect small farmers' access to fair markets and call for redirection of existing federal programs skewed toward serving the interest of large agribusinesses. Follow-

ing are highlights of the Commission recommendations:

- Cultivate the strengths of small farms.
- Fair, competitive, and open markets for small farms.
- Establish future generations of small farmers.
- Emphasize sustainable agriculture.
- Strengthen the competitive position of small farms.
- Provide just and humane working conditions.

For a copy of the report *A Time to Act*, write the National Commission on Small Farms, PO Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013 or call 202-720-0122.

**Women, Food
& Agriculture
Network**

A Tides Center Project
RR 2, Box 79
Atlantic, IA 50022

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

Address Service Requested

Let's keep connected:

Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Fill out the form below and we will continue to send you our newsletter.
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 _____

Phone _____

Organization _____

Fax _____

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

Address _____

E-mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please mail this form to:

Women, Food & Agriculture

RR 2, Box 79

Atlantic, IA 50022