Volume 1, Number 3
August 1998

Women, Food & Agriculture Network

Women in Agriculture

"Women Coming Together to Feed the World" was the theme of the 1998 Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture held in Washington, DC on June 28-July 2. It was sponsored by the President's Interagency Council on Women.

The First International Conference on Women in Agriculture was held in July 1994 in Melbourne, Australia. It was designed as a forum for women in agriculture to share their experiences and learn more about successful farming and agribusiness techniques.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation sponsored approximately 30 women from all over the country. Three were from Iowa: Donna Bauer from Audubon, Susan Zacharkis-Jutz from Solon, and Denise O'Brien from Atlantic. Betty Wells and Danielle Wirth (supported by the Stanley Foundation) went as representatives of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network. They all participated in, and in some cases led, several workshops. The number of attendees was estimated at approximately 1,200 from 62 countries.

"Women took time out of their busy lives to attend a conference in order to learn and share concerns about the state of agriculture," Donna Bauer of Audubon stated. "It was amazing to sit and visit with women from all over the world and learn from them."

Following is an account from Danielle Wirth on two workshops she attended. She starts with a story from a Women, Food and Agriculture meeting in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, where visitors from Poland and Russia had joined in a visit to the farm of Laura Krouse. She then recalls sessions from the conference.

See page 9 and 10 for a report on the activities of attendees who were disappointed with the lack of discussion on issues and policy at the conference. They formulated two resolutions and a list of concerns needing consideration.

How Do You Know Good Soil?

by Danielle Wirth

At a Women, Food and Agriculture meeting in July, we visited Laura Krouse's farm and garden in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. Halina Kacprzak from Gliwice, Poland, bent down and scooped up a handful of crumbly dark soil. She squeezed the handful and allowed bits to fall through her fingers. She smelled the soil and then slowly turned some of it between her fingers. Our eyes met. I smiled and said, "It's good soil?" "Oh, Yes!" she said. She knew that one of the best ways to know the health of soil is to

(Soil, continued on page10)

Mission

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

Be sure and see this one!!

Calendar

September 19-20, 1998: Renewable Energy Expo, Johnson County 4-H Fairgrounds, Iowa City. Keynote speaker Christopher Flavin from Worldwatch Institute, exhibits, demonstrations. Contact Nancy Ewald, I-Renew, tel: 319-338-3200.

September 21, 22, 23, 1998 at 9 pm: The Farmer's Wife, a documentary portrait of three years in the life of a Nebraska farm family facing its toughest crisis, will be broadcast as a Frontline special on September 21, 22 & 23 at 9 pm. (Check local listings.)

September 26, 1998: Audubon County Family Farm Fall Festival. Contact Donna Bauer, tel: 712-563-4084.

October 10, 1998: Magic Beanstalk Harvest Festival. Contact Robert Karp, tel: 515-232-7162.

October 15, 1998: World Rural Women's Day. Theme: Human Rights for all rural women.

October 16, 1998: World Food Day. Contact Denise O'Brien, tel: 712-243-5752 or email: hnob@nishna.net.

October 17-18, 1998: Women, Food & Agriculture fall meeting. Garst Farm, Coon Rapids. Contact Denise O'Brien, tel: 712-243-5752, hnob@nishna.net.

October 23-25, 1998: Community Food Security Conference, Pittsburgh,PA. Contact Andy Fischer, tel: 310-822-5410 or email: asfishar@aol.com.

November 12, 1998: The Struggle for Human Rights. Program in conjunction with visit of Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchu Tum from Guatemala. University of Iowa, Iowa City. Contact United Nations Association, 319-337-7290 or email: unaiowa@inav.net.

News Briefs

World Food Day

Women in agriculture can participate in World Food Day by scheduling a satellite teleconference sponsored by the U.S. National Committee for World Food Day. This event will provide an opportunity to bring together community leaders to discuss and plan for increasing food security.

"Food for All: Right or Goal" is the topic of the teleconference, with a special emphasis on how the rights of women and the right to food are interrelated. It will be telecast from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm on October 16, World Food Day.

Denise O'Brien, Coordinator for the Women, Food and Agriculture Network, encourages women to contact the extension office in their area to be a host site for the teleconference. "This will be a perfect opportunity to bring together men and women from various churches, social service agencies, extension and the business community to talk about what food security means in our communities. Many times we think of food security as a problem in developing countries, but the issue exists right in our own backyard."

Anyone wanting more information regarding this event, please contact Denise O'Brien at 712-243-5752 or email: hnob@nishna.net.

Resources

Organizations

Iowa Network for Community Agriculture: contact Jan Libbey at 515-495-6367 or email libland@kalnet.com.

Des Moines Community Gardening Coalition: contact coordinator at Des Moines Botanical Center, 515-242-2934 or email TevaD@aol.com.

Rural Concerns Hotline for legal and counselling referrals, financial/credit info,and hotline: 800-447-1985 (Iowa only) or 515-281-7708

Websites

International Forum on Food and Agriculture: news, events and resources, http://www.iffah.org

EPA website: http://www.epa.gov/

Consumers International is sponsoring a campaign calling for mandatory and comprehensive labeling of all genetically modified foods. See website: http://www.consumersinternational.org/

National Catholic Rural Life Conference: http://www.ncrlc.com/ncrlc.html

Email Listserv

To subscribe to a listserv on sustainable agriculture, send a message to majordomo@ces.ncsu.edu. In the body of the message type: subscribe sanet-mg-digest.

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.

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Profile of Change — Our Soil Profile, Then and Now

by Jane Shuttleworth

By now it is fairly common knowledge that Iowa leads the nation in soil erosion and has lost approximately 50% of its topsoil since the introduction of intensive agriculture. Yet, the corns and beans keep growing. What keeps them growing? How has this affected soil structure and fertility? What does this mean for the future?

Dr. Lee Burras is an agronomist at Iowa State University concerned about the long term implications of such massive soil erosion. He is researching how intensive agriculture has impacted soil composition in Dickinson County in northwest Iowa by comparing present day soil profile data with refereed Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) data from 50 years ago. A refereed profile is a soil description agreed upon by a team of soil scientists to ensure consistency in collection of soil data and to correct for individual variation in soil interpretation. Reliable soil profile data prior to 50 years ago does not exist. Dr. Burras uses historic sources for qualitative information and compares his data with soil profiles from undisturbed prairie. He chose northwest Iowa to conduct this project because land use has remained primarily agricultural in the past 130 years since Euro-American settlement in the area. I summarize his results here and preface it with a review of soil formation processes.

Soil is formed from the close interaction of climate, topography and plant and animal activity with the parent or geological material on which the soil forms. In Dickinson County as in the rest of Iowa the parent material is glacial deposits. This process leads to the development of layers in the soil called horizons, simplified for discussion here as the A, B and C horizons. The A horizon is the closest to the surface and contains the highest amount of organic material, plant growth and animal activity. Agriculturally, it is also defined as the plowed layer. The B horizon is a layer of transition between the A horizon and the underlying C horizon. The B horizon has less biological activity than the A horizon. The C horizon, representing the parent material, is the least influenced by processes of soil formation.

An important characteristic of soil is its structure. Soils are made up of pores and solids. The pores allow the infiltration of water and the exchanges of gases and nutrients between the roots and the atmosphere. A healthy soil is made of compound particles of soil called aggregates. Their spherical shape allows ample pore space between them.

A soil profile is a vertical section of soil extending from the A to the C horizons, from the soil surface down to the parent material. In his comparison of NRCS refereed profiles from 50 years ago with present conditions, Dr. Burras made the following four observations:

1. Despite massive soil erosion, the A horizon has increased in depth. The A horizon of Clarion soils, for example, has increased from 27 to 44 centimeters.
2. The solum, or portion of the soil profile including the A and the B horizons, has maintained the same depth although the B horizon has slightly decreased while the A horizon has increased.
3. The color of the solum has become lighter, indicating a decrease in organic content through oxidation.
4. The soil has changed from a spherical to a blockier, cube like structure. This decreases the available pore space for the infiltration of water and the exchange of gases between roots and the atmosphere. He attributes the increased blockiness to soil compaction by farm machinery.

Burras attributes the increased depth of the A horizon and corresponding decrease in the B horizon he attributes to deeper working of the soil surface by agricultural equipment.

In summary, our soils contain less organic matter than a century ago, and are less fertile, less porous and less able to store water.

(Jane Shuttleworth is a naturalist and self-described watershed anthropologist who is studying the cultural and ecological history of the Iowa Great Lakes region.)

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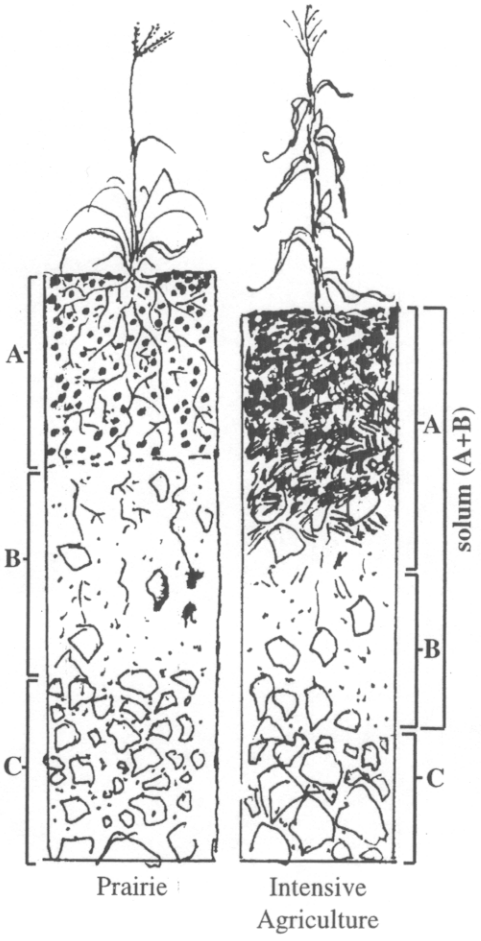

Summer in a Jar Preserves the Joy of the Summer Garden

For a period of weeks or a month or two, we may glory in the abundance of a good garden but what about the rest of the year?

by Carol R. Smith

One of the joys of summer is a wonderful garden. How great it is to go to the garden for lunch or dinner—picking fresh food with its wonderful flavor to bring to the summer table. We wait and wait for the first fresh green beans, the first sweet corn, the first red, ripe tomatoes, the sweet taste of melons and squash. Alas, the season is all too short. For a period of weeks or a month or two, we may glory in the abundance of a good garden—but what about the rest of the year? A knowledge of food preservation, the maintenance of safe and nutritious food for an extended period of time can extend the joy of the summer garden through the year—preserving summer in a jar, so to speak.

Methods of Food Preservation

While the primary objective of food preservation is to prevent spoilage by preserving food until it can be consumed, it also offers the opportunity to have a wide variety of foods year round, and can be economical as well. The primary methods of food preservation include freezing, canning, sweetening and acidifying jellies and jams, fermenting, pickling, salting, and drying.

Fermentation, pickling, salting and drying are food preservation methods with long histories. Until fairly recently in human existence, they were the only ways to preserve foods with any degree of safety for future use. They also change the appearance and taste of foods considerably. When sugar became more available, jams and jellies were added to the arsenal of the gardener seeking to extend food availability beyond summer. None of these, however, worked well to preserve the taste and form of foods, and their safety could not be guaranteed under a wide variety of conditions.

Providing a wide variety of palatable food that would stay safe in many conditions proved to be the impetus that at last produced a new technology in food preservation. In the early 19th century it was discovered that one could preserve foods by putting them in tins or cans, sealing the top and cooking them in boiling water for a period of time. The heat killed organisms and drove oxygen out of the container to form a vacuum seal, thus preserving the foods inside. The art of canning was born.

Canning

Commercial canning still uses metal cans where one time usage is the rule and shipping is a prime concern. Most home canning today, however, uses glass containers because they are easier to seal and are reusable. The cooking process has changed as well. Problems arose with spoilage, particularly in foods with low acid content such as vegetables and meat. To make it possible to obtain the higher temperatures needed for safety at the very center of a large container in a short time, pressure canning was introduced first in commercial operations and then in home canning. Today's recommendations are to use pressure canners for all meats and low acid vegetables and fruits while other items may be processed in the more traditional boiling water bath.

Freezing

As freezers came into homes in the 1950s and 60s, freezing as a preservation method became common—it had the additional advantage of taking less time and equipment than canning. All one had to do was to kill enzymes that would destroy the quality of some vegetables with a quick boiling water bath called blanching, add sugar to aid in shape retention of fruits or citric acid to prevent browning, put in containers or wrap securely and freeze. Preservation of

(Continued on next page)

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meats was especially easy with a freezer. While there are foods that do not freeze well, many foods and food combinations can be preserved very well by freezing.

Sources of Information

Production of food and preservation of food go hand in hand. Eventually, if you are interested in your food supply and its safety and quality, you will probably investigate good food preservation practices. One of the best sources of information about good food preservation practices is your county office of the Iowa State University Extension Service or the Extension Service in other states. For ISU Distribution Center, call 515-294-5247, or email pubdist@exnet.iastate.edu.

The ***Food Preservation Resource Notebook*** (N-3176 from ISU Extension) has information on all forms of food preservation and background information on storage and nutrition of preserved foods. If you are interested in canning in particular, ask for the ***Complete Guide to Home Canning***, (USDA bulletin 539). It has complete instructions and many recipes for all kinds of canned foods. Look for Iowa bulletins Pm 1043-1047 for information on canning and freezing fruits and vegetables. There are also other bulletins on pickling and drying of foods and the making of jams and jellies. In addition to sources on home preservation, there is information on commercial food preservation and food safety in a commercial environment. ISU Extension also has a Families Extension Hotline Answer Line with a wonderful file on food preservation and safety to troubleshoot any question you may have—call 800-262-3804.

Whether it is summer in a jar—the joy of looking at colorful and appetizing jars of food well preserved for the future of your family—or preserving food as part of an agricultural enterprise, food preservation is an important part of the process of bringing high quality, safe food from the farmer to the family table.

(Carol R. Smith is a member of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network and a county extension education director for Guthrie County. She lives on an acreage and has a big garden that is mostly salad greens, herbs, and squash.)

DNA is Kids' Stuff for the Kids

by Mary Steinmaus

"Ever feel like life is crazy? We are going to explore ways young women can take charge of their lives and **SEE THE POSSIBILITIES...**"

These are the words on the brochure used to publicize Summer Explorations, a program sponsored by the Stanley Foundation for young women who have completed 7th or 8th grades.

On August 3, 1998, we journeyed to the 4-Mounds Inn and Conference Center located in Dubuque, Iowa, and spent 5 days exploring the world around us and then talking about our discoveries. Guests visited us throughout the week, bringing with them stories about 4-Mounds and the women who lived there, technical information related to organic gardening and genetics, and practical, useful ideas about how, as women, we can ensure our personal safety in our local communities.

A Visit to an Organic Garden

A high point of the week was a visit from Laura Krouse, Women Food and Agriculture Network member, teacher at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, organic farmer, and owner of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation in Mt. Vernon. In a heavy mist, we walked to the organic garden, walked through the pumpkin patch, and identified potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, squash, flowers and herbs growing in profusion all around us. About half the garden plot was actually "worked" by 4-Mounds and the young people involved in the Youth Empowerment Services program. The remaining area was a community garden for individuals and families from Dubuque who plant and care for small garden plots. The area was obviously well tended and beautiful.

And What is DNA?

As the mist turned into a drizzle and then a driving rain, we returned to the Grey Mansion and talked about our connection with food and where/how it is produced. Later in the day, everyone participated in a chemistry "lab" where we isolated DNA. We were fascinated to actually see the "stuff of life" form in our test tubes.

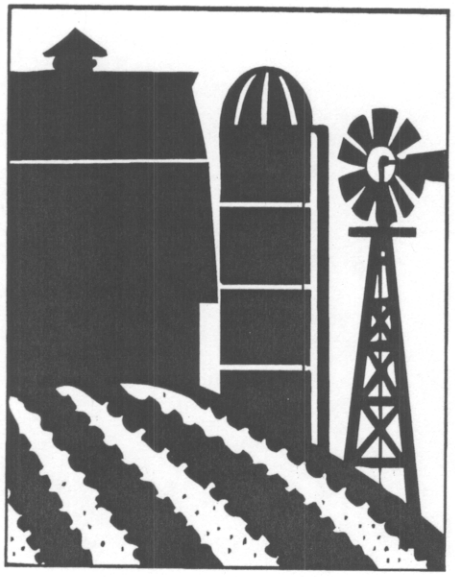
Laura Krouse led us in a discussion of what it means to be able to isolate DNA so quickly and, literally, in the dining room of your own home. For the next two hours, these 15 young women participated in a discussion that ranged from the global economy, to the impact of genetic engineering on our lives, to what this means to the future of the planet and the future of each of us. Some of the participants, over the course of the discussion, were able to come to definite conclusions about what was ethical and what was not, but many simply did not know.

It is clear to me, however, that our young people, given information and opportunities, are able and eager to grapple with some of these issues. It is also clear to me that we will be leaving many of these issues to be resolved by the minds of young people such as these. We need to be creating more opportunities for youth to learn, to reflect on, and to discuss the issues that affect our lives now and will surely affect the future of our planet.

"Thanks, so much, Laura. I really learned a lot. The DNA thing rocked. We'll have to start something in Muscatine like what you do for Mt. Vernon." —Lindsay McMains, 14 1998 Summer Explorations

(Mary Steinmaus is a member of Women, Food & Agriculture and a program officer for the Stanley Foundation, which sponsors Summer Explorations for Young Women.)

Video Encourages Sustainable Agriculture



Slow Food: Sustainable Agriculture and Responsible Eating, a video by Linda Gammell, Michal McCall, and Sandra Menefee Taylor

Reviewed by Cris Carusi, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

Against the golden back drop of a wheat field, a woman's hands slowly sort through photos of family farms. The narrator begins, "In the last five years we've talked to dozens of farmers who practice or advocate a new kind of farming . . . one that supports rural communities and safeguards the health and well-being of people and the environment. They call it sustainable agriculture."

This is the last we hear of the narrator until the conclusion. The video's creators wisely let the farmers and the images speak for themselves, without interruption or explanation.

Slow Food: Sustainable Agriculture and Responsible Eating presents a convincing argument for responsible eating. The farmers' words and the brilliant scenes of their colorful, diversified farms made me want to meet and know the farmers who raise my food. This is an excellent video for "eaters" who want to learn more about where their food comes from and what it means to eat responsibly. It is also a good resource for farmers because it challenges conventional stereotypes of farming.

This video is unique because all of the farmers are women. Its creators capture the words, wisdom and work of 14 women from Minnesota, Michigan, North Dakota and Wisconsin. The creators spend no time trying to prove or justify the fact that women should be considered farmers - they simply let the women speak about their lives and their farms. This approach works. There is never any doubt that these women are competent farmers and decision-makers and that they have plenty to say.

"Sustainable to me means that we are farming with the future in mind," begins North Dakota farmer Theresa Podoll. " I don't think we've arrived at a sustainable agriculture. And I don't think our agriculture can be sustainable until we get the consumer involved with where their food is coming from."

Themes of involvement and relationships weave their way through the video. The women candidly illustrate their relationships to food, to past and future generations, and to the land.

"(The land) wasn't intended to be used as a commodity," explains Diane Schill, a North Dakota farmer. "It was intended to be nurtured and used together with the family, with the community, with each other."

The women mention farming practices such as biological pest control and management-intensive grazing. They share their struggles with acquiring land, developing markets, and finding processors for their products. Several women discuss the process of converting their farms from conventional to sustainable production and their reasons for doing it.

"I didn't like having to handle (my husband's) clothes after he'd handled (chemicals)," notes North Dakota farmer Janet Jacobson. "Women are the ones who get the instructions from the chemical companies on washing things three times . . . . I think women are far more concerned about chemical usage than their husbands."

This video addresses inefficiencies in the industrial food system. It points out that the organic industry, which began as a model of mutual trust and concern, is going down the same competitive, impersonal path. It illustrates alternatives to the industrial food system such as community supported agriculture.

As I listened, I began to wonder what our food system would look like if women played a stronger role in shaping it. Perhaps the health and well being of the land and future generations would be given precedence over short-term profit. Perhaps relationships between farmers and their customers would be considered an essential component of trade. Perhaps people and communities would be included in the "bottom line."

In the words of Janet Jacobson, "I think the hope isn't in the world market . . . . I think the hope is in people saying . . . we're going to look for smaller markets, we're going to disconnect from that whole system and find another way to do it."

To Order a Copy

Slow Food *is a 30-minute videotape made in 1997. The project was funded by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. It is available for $10 from Sandra Taylor at 255 E. Kellogg, St. Paul, MN 55101; tel: 612-291-7492. Women, Food and Agriculture has a copy for loan. Contact Denise O'Brien at* 712-243-5752 or email: hnob@nishna.net.

Vera's Place at Ollie

by glenda farrier

My cousin, Vera Mitts, lived her entire life on the Keokuk county farm purchased in 1856 by her great grandfather for $10.25 an acre. It was to be home and livelihood for the Mitts family for the next 136 years. Vera never married and had no children. With the disbursement of her estate in 1992, the farm was sold for $1,256 an acre. Another Iowa Century Farm was lost.

Long Years have rolled past
since I've been down this lane
and if not for weeds and decay
the place really looks just the same.

I fight with a vine at the iron gate
and, victorious, make my way through the lawn
parting a sea of deep ravaging grass
to a threshold where once I belonged.

Through dirty rippled panes I trepidly peer
expecting what I know I will see
but when I wipe the glass with the sleeve of my shirt
I see instead things that used to be.

This weathered window pane becomes a crystal ball
and conjures up a sepiaed musty past.
I see them sitting staunchly round that big, old, oak table.
"Oh, when had I seen them all last?"

The boisterous image darkens as I hear
a melody of tinkling trace chains
and the slow sucking sound of horses' hooves
plodding home in the mud and the rain.

Large horses boldly blow noses blanketed in the evening dew
and wearily splash puddles as tiredly they make their way
to stalls in the big barn; I hasten to meet them
rub them down and give them some hay.

The top door I fling open with excitement
so long since I'd seen this fine team
but I duck from the path of a startled pigeon
then more bolt from the emptiness of my dream

I suddenly sense my erred warp in perception
though my spirits do raise not a bit
sadly I close and latch the old barn door
and tears trickle over my bitten lip

I shuffle past the concrete stock tank
where once swam great fishes of gold
this is the place I would come to daydream
so I sit again and the thoughts take hold.

Powerful, painful, joyful memories
swarm my heart in grieving alarm
as I bid farewell to the end of a family
and mourn the death of an Iowa Century Farm.

Farmers Host International Visitors from Japan

by Denise O'Brien

In July, Farmers in Audubon and Cass Counties were host to a large group of Japanese consumers and farmers. The group represented a number of consumers' cooperatives and the Independent Farmers Union in Japan.

The purpose of the visit was to observe the social, economic and environmental impacts of industrialized agriculture on rural families and communities. There was also a strong interest in how farmers are involved in local food production and distribution.

Ms. Mika Iba, the coordinator and interpreter for the group, has a long history of involvement with food issues ranging from international trade agreements to genetically modified organisms (i.e. Roundup Ready Soybeans and Bt corn). She is a board member of the International Forum on Globalization and helps facilitate an analysis of the impact of globalization on local economies.

To begin to understand a rural economy, the group started out with a visit to the Atlantic Locker. A local business, it has developed and patented the "Oinker Burger," a pork patty in the shape of a pig. There was an in-depth discussion about the process of getting a patent, the regulations on a small locker/processing business, and the impact of the large hog factories on this local processor. A drive down the main street of Atlantic revealed empty storefronts, a common feature of small Midwest communities where consumers are going to larger towns to shop in malls.

The next stop was the Rolling Acres Farm of the Larry Harris and Denise O'Brien family. Denise showed them around her ten acres of fruit and vegetables and talked about the current status of farming in Cass county. She used statistics from Iowa State University to show the negative changes in farming over the last ten years.

The group then traveled to the Vic and Cindy Madsen farm in Audubon County. They took everyone on a walk around the farm pointing out the crops and talking about transitioning to organic production. The hoop houses in which the Madsen's raise their hogs were compared and contrasted with the large confinement facilities that were just down the road. Cindy gave everyone a brochure of the Audubon Family Farms and told how several farm families in the county market their products direct to consumers.

The group then made their way to the home of Dianna Sheehy where she and her neighbors served a wonderful meal of salads and sandwiches topped off by a choice of five different kinds of pies! Dianna is well known in the Audubon County for her pie making. There were 36 people who moved around the four tables in order to get to know each other better.

After lunch a tractor and hayrack was ready to take the group on a tour of the neighborhood. Donna Bauer showed the effects of the loss of family farms in her own locale. She and her family are farming on ground where four family farms once existed. Using the statistics about Audubon farms and population, Donna gave an overall demographic and economic picture of her county.

The group then looked at a project that was a partnership between the Bauers and the USDA. This project was the planting of a riparian buffer zone. A USDA official spoke of partnerships between the government and farmers for protection of the environment.

Heading back to Cass County, there was a stop at a parcel of land that was being converted to prairie, and the day finished with a visit to the farmer's market in Atlantic.

As the group left Atlantic the next morning, they stopped at a local farm that was used as a test plot and showcase for Pioneer seeds. The Japanese have a very strong campaign going in their own country around the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and are quite concerned at the outright acceptance of these products by farmers in the United States. In fact, the next stop on their journey in the United States was to be St. Louis to participate in a demonstration against Monsanto and its use of biotechnology.

The visitors left with a different picture of the state of agriculture in the United States. The image of U.S. agriculture that the government presents is of highly efficient, well run farms. While for the most parts true, the visitors found there is a cost to this type of agriculture.

Visitors and hosts alike learned from each other about the problems that surround industrialized agriculture in their countries. Once people start to share the concerns about production, processing and distribution of food, national borders disappear. "Think Globally, Act Locally" is an adage one begins to understand with more clarity when visitors come to our farms and we visit others in their countries.

(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.)

Discussion of Issues and Strategies at Agriculture Conference

There was a down side to the 1998 Second International Conference on Women In Agriculture held in Washington, DC on June 28-July 2. Many women had come prepared to work on issues that effect their everyday lives. They came to elevate women's voices in a predominantly male world. They came to make recommendations and develop strategies to "improve our world," as stated in the conference brochure. That is where the conference fell short. There was no formal process for women to make resolutions and work out strategies that could continue the work after the conference ended.

A group of women spontaneously organized their own gathering in which to bring together women who wanted to work on resolutions and strategies after their request for conference time was rejected by the conference convener, USDA Under Secretary Jill Long Thompson.

Two evening meetings, organized to work on the "meaty" issues, were attended by more than 100 women from all over the world. The large group divided into two smaller ones to work on 1) resolutions and 2) a communication structure. As one women said, "I didn't come to learn how to milk cows; I already know how to do that. I came to work on a strategy to further women's leadership in agriculture!"

The two resolutions at right and a list of issues and concerns (page 10) were brought forward. The women activists copied and distributed the documents on the last day of the conference but neither the resolutions nor the list of issues and concerns were presented or formally acknowledged.

The conference presented a wonderful opportunity for women to come together but fell short of giving the women an opportunity to create a statement that reflected their views of the current condition of agriculture and solutions for change.

Resolution I

Resolution of the Second International Conference for Women in Agriculture, Washington, DC, June 28-July 2, 1998.

WHEREAS women are an integral and critical part of the global food production system, producing 65 percent of the world's food supply; and

WHEREAS a stable and reliable supply of safe and nutritious food is an essential component of human health and a hallmark of national prosperity, and is in the best interest of global security; and

WHEREAS maintaining an ample food supply depends on an agriculture that is respectful of those who work the land, respectful of the environment, and sustainable over the long term,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the role and rights of women in agriculture must be respected and supported by the nations and the societies that they serve; that women involved in agriculture, whether by choice or by need, shall be valued and consulted as equal partners in the production and trade of agricultural goods, and that women in agriculture shall be valued and consulted as well in the best practicable methods of agricultural production to sustain human health, international prosperity, and the global environment.

Resolution II

Resolution of the Second International Conference for Women in Agriculture, Washington, DC, June 28-July 2, 1998.

WHEREAS the challenges that confront agriculture and its women practitioners are many, while the opportunities to examine and address these challenges in an international setting are few; and

WHEREAS the women who attended the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture are grateful for the opportunity to meet and exchange views with our sisters from other nations; and

WHEREAS the conference provided an opportunity to build upon the relationships and information that came from the First International Conference on Women in Australia in Melbourne, Australia, in 1994, as well as the International Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that we express our deep appreciation to the organizers, sponsors, and hosts of the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture, and that we express further our hope that there will be additional opportunities in the future to discuss the problems and challenges facing women in agriculture and to develop recommendations for their solution.

See statement on issues and concerns on next page.

Issues and Concerns

Second International Conference of Women in Agriculture Washington, D.C., June 28-July 2, 1998

Women in agriculture face issues and concerns that challenge their economic security, their families' health, and their quality of life. These vary widely by nation and by political and social structure.

Conference attendees identified the following as being among the most critical issues. While this list is not all-inclusive, it touches upon many issues that women in agriculture believe to be deserving of urgent attention:

- **Food security.** We believe that all people should have access to a variety of wholesome, nutritious foods grown as closely as possible to their homes. Maintaining local production capacity is an essential component of a secure food supply.

- **Protection from banned chemicals and hazardous equipment.** We believe that women and their families in developing nations should not be exposed to agricultural chemicals or equipment banned or restricted in developed nations because of health and human safety concerns.

- **Transportation.** We believe that a secure food supply depends on a reliable transportation system. Transportation includes farm-to-market roads in areas lacking these, as well as reasonably priced, reliable transport systems, including railroads, airliners and seagoing vessels.

- **Information and resources.** We believe that women should have access to information about agricultural production and marketing, as well as access to and control over resources, such as land and financial resources, needed to achieve efficient production and appropriate returns.

- **Biotechnology.** We believe that biogenetic resources must be preserved and protected from commercial activities that could lead to their loss. Many species are being commercially produced using resources preserved for generations by women. True ownership of these resources is vested in farm women and their communities, in accordance with rights recognized at the biogenetics conference in Germany.

- **Value of work.** We believe that the failure to account for or recognize the value of the unpaid work that women do on their farms and in their households has led to a general devaluing of women. We demand that governments implement the Beijing decision to measure and value women's uncompensated work, including agricultural work, in official statistics.

- **Leadership and policy.** We believe that women in agriculture should be represented in fair proportion to their real numbers on the boards of commodity groups and that the voices of women should be listened to and acted upon in national and international discussions of agriculture production, trade and distribution.

- **Production and market concentration.** We believe that increasing concentration in the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural products have had deleterious environmental, economic, and social impacts in many areas of the globe, and should neither be supported nor encouraged.

- **Food pricing.** We believe that the price of food must more accurately and fairly reflect the true costs of production, including costs to the environment, to agricultural families, and to rural communities.

Woman historically have held primary responsibility for production, acquisition, and preparation of food for their households. Globally, they have been and continue to be the growers, the marketers, the processors, and the stewards of the land.

It is only natural now that women look ahead once again, observing carefully what is happening in the food production system, and raising their voices to assure an abundant, accessible, safe, and nutritious food supply for all.

How Do You Know Good Soil?

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make physical contact with it. Smell it, taste it, play with it, and get your elbows into it so you can see the detritus feeders, soil organisms, like earthworms and sow bugs, that help add to soil fertility.

I had flash backs to the Washington, D.C. conference in June and one of the sessions I attended on soil physical fertility. Dr. Usha Pillar-McGarry, School of Land and Food, University of Queensland, Australia, has developed a way to quantify the qualitative data used by good farmers to assure soil health. Most introductory environmental science courses (mine included) enjoin students to view total soil fertility in terms of organic matter, mineral content present and physical characteristics such as how well water, oxygen and plant roots permeate subsoil areas. With high organic matter, low compaction, and the presence of soil micro-organisms, it can be presumed that the soil is relatively healthy. (See story on page 3 on changes in our Midwestern soil.)

Soil physical fertility translates into the number and size of air spaces between soil particles. More pore spaces means more water retention, more oxygen exchange in the root zone, more soil micro-organisms, and more room for root growth. McGarry and her colleagues have managed to measure this and quantify the results visually.

A device that is approximately 6 inches square and 24 inches deep extracts a core sample of soil roughly that size. Into the device, they gravity feed paraffin or a polymer resin. After the material dries and hardens, thin slices are shaved off and photographed. The resulting image dramatizes conditions of compaction that a good farmer would already understand simply by bending down and using the "scoop" method.

Health Risks of Pesticides

The workshop on Health Risks of Pesticides focused on protecting farm workers, many of whom speak English as a second language. The impact on human health by synthetic organic compounds like DDT and other chemicals, has been discussed since Rachel Carson bravely

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Statement On the Globalization and Industrialization of Agriculture

The International Forum on Food and Agriculture (IFA) is a global association of individuals concerned about the trend towards industrialization and globalization in food and fiber production and distribution systems and the resulting negative social, economic, and ecological impacts. It has been created by the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) as a tool for facilitating global cooperation on these issues.

From June 6 - 10, 1998 the IFA held it's inaugural strategy meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia. This session brought together 54 people from five continents (12 countries) including organizers from various farmer and peasant movements, academics, researchers, NGO leaders, and owners of food processing and distribution firms.

Participants at the Vancouver meeting wrote the following statement to express the group's opinion on the negative impacts of the industrialization and globalization of agriculture.

We believe that the industrialization and globalization of food and fiber imperils humanity and the natural world. Reducing farming to a monocultural, synthetic, transnational corporate business threatens the health, nourishment, right livelihood, and spirituality of communities and the earth. It is insane to believe that we must poison land and water and waste the soil in order to feed and clothe ourselves. Five decades of the so-called Green Revolution have not only led to the destruction and contamination of water, soil, biodiversity, and human communities, but exacerbated hunger worldwide. One of the most critical impacts of industrial agriculture is climate change, which will destroy the natural basis of agriculture itself. The patenting of life, corporate ownership and manipulation of our genetic heritage, is one of the greatest threats ever imposed by industrial agriculture: the human right to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves and our families is at stake. Institutions and treaties such as the World Trade Organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Codex Alimentarius, North American Free Trade Agreement, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the European Union have accelerated the process of agricultural industrialization and globalization while promoting the rights of corporations over those of people.

We know that there are non-toxic and non-destructive alternatives to global industrial agriculture, and we know that these alternatives can provide more food. Farmers around the world are farming in ways that respect their unique ecological and cultural communities. Building on their wisdom, all farms of the twenty-first century can be ecologically regenerative, community sustaining, biologically and culturally diverse, as well as energy conserving. We must not only build upon the existing knowledge and vision of farmers, but we must expand partnerships and create coalitions that serve to re-empower them.

In order to rescue our food system, we need more skilled farmers who have access to land, seed, and the knowledge of local biological systems. Also essential to a healthy food system, is clean land, air, water and soil and the right to save seeds to ensure future harvests.

Scientific organizations and transnational corporations that are experimenting with, and releasing poisons, synthetic compounds and genetically modified organisms into the biosphere should be held fully accountable for the safety of their practices and products. Corporations, scientists and governments should honor the precautionary principle and take preventive action in the face of scientific uncertainty in order to avoid cultural and ecological harm.

We affirm, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the right to food is sacred. The right to food transcends basic nutrition and hunger and includes the right to produce one's own food. We also affirm that consumers have the right to know where their food comes from, what is in it, and how it was produced. Furthermore, farmers and consumers have a right to maintain local control over food production, distribution and consumption.

Our bodies, our plants and animals, our air, water, land, and soil, are not commodities and are not patentable. When a food production system violates the rights of citizens and the natural order of the planet's ecosystems, it is essential that we the people make use of our inalienable freedom to correct those abuses.

We stand united on these points.

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alerted the world to this former war time technology. I attended the session wanting to learn more science, but learned more about politics.

Representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency were there as well as lawyer/activists for farm workers. The discussion solidified for me the notion that Americans are paying far to little for their food. The impact on agricultural workers is not considered when we purchase a product. Farmers who use organic and sustainable methods are not rewarded as they ought to be.

But I was still waiting for the science. I was becoming frustrated with the EPA folks concerning the science and their position that "safe" use of these materials is possible. An accumulating amount of data both laboratory and epidemiological suggest that there are no safe exposure levels of these chemicals. There are only calculated risks.

I was unable to get the EPA representatives to move on this issue, but the agency itself is on the cusp of banning most if not all organo-phosphates as a class. They need to be encouraged in this step. It will open the door for more biological controls and create an even stronger organic growing market.

I did not openly challenge the EPA, but volunteered to stay after and relate how synthetic organics bioaccumulate and biomagnify in the environment. Some people stayed and talked. The EPA folks did not.

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