

Women, Food & Agriculture Network

The World Trade Organization: What Is It ?

by Denise O'Brien



Logo of the World Trade Organization

The United States Department of Agriculture recently sponsored eleven World Trade Organization (WTO) Listening Sessions around the United States. Two members of the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) gave testimony at the session held in Des Moines on July 12th (see pages 3 and 4). But first, just what is the WTO?

The World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in January 1995 as a result of what is called the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed at that time. The WTO administers these agreements, handles disputes, and monitors trade policies. With about 35 exceptions, including China, Russia, and Vietnam, a total of 134 countries have signed the agreements and are therefore monitored by the WTO.

People's organizations throughout the world have questioned the benefits the WTO. A number of the farm organizations in the US have called into question its philosophy of growth based on export. There has been little public outcry in the US over the world trade negotiations, but worldwide, especially in non-industrialized countries, the WTO's model of corporate managed trade, has been widely protested.

According to Public Citizen, a citizens watchdog organization, the destructive impact of the WTO's policies on American families may be felt for years to come. The WTO is a powerful global bureaucracy where unelected trade bureaucrats are empowered to decide the fate of democratically passed laws. If any local, state, or federal law of a WTO member country is found to violate the organization's trade rules, the law must be changed, or that nation could face economic sanctions. The WTO places the importance of international commerce and industry interests before all other values, including consumer safeguards, environmental and labor protections, food safety, and human rights.

The World Trade Organization will be holding a Ministerial Summit in Seattle from November 29 through December 3, 1999 — on the eve of WTO's fifth anniversary. This summit meeting will determine the WTO's agenda for negotiations for the coming decade. President Clinton, who supports initiating a new round of "free trade" negotiations, will welcome trade Ministers from 100-plus nations. Public Citizen urges citizen activists to make sure that there will be "No New Round!"

At the July meeting of WFAN several women expressed interest in attending

WTO, continued on page 6

Mission

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



Calendar

August 12-22: Iowa State Fair. See the Community Agriculture booth.

September: Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA)/Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) Field Days:

15th: Wildwoods (Virginia Moser) at Garrison, Iowa.

16th: Z-J Farm (Susan & Jeff Zacharakis-Jutz), Solon, Iowa.

18th: One Step at a Time Gardens (Jan Libbey & Tim Landgraf), Kanawha, Iowa.

August 27, 1999: Developing Local Food Systems Workshop, Johnson County Fairgrounds, Iowa City. Morning features Cameron Word, expert on the process of establishing kitchen incubators. Afternoon features overview of organic industry, the new Iowa Organic Certification program, making the transition to organics, and tips on marketing poultry in specialty markets. Registration is limited to 30. Registration fee is \$35. For info call Sara at 515-294-0588.

August 27 - 29, 1999: Immigration Law Statewide Training, Multi-Cultural Centre, Muscatine Iowa. Friday, 9 - 5, basic training provided by Diego Bonsesatti, immigration rights specialist for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. More advanced training continues on Saturday, 9 - 12 and Sunday. For more information contact Ann Naffier at 515-255-8114 or Rosa Mendoza at 319-263-9018.

October 12-15, 1999: National Small Farm Conference, St. Louis. Call Diane Mayerfeld at 515-294-0887; website: <http://www.luce.lincolnu.edu/nsfc/default.htm>.

October 14-17, 1999: Toward a Democratic and Just Food System. Chicago, IL. Contact Community Food Security Coalition, tel.: 310-822-5410; email: asfisher@aol.com.

October 15: Rural Women's Day. See website <http://www.woman.ch>.

October 29-30: Next WFAN meeting in a central Iowa location. Place TBA. We will study more on WTO and world trade.

November 13, 1999: Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA) Harvest Celebration, Grinnell, Iowa. Tour Midwest Harvest Tofu plant, attend

Wisconsin Healthy Farmer session, and go to the INCA business meeting. For more information, call Gary Guthrie: 515-382-3117.

January 29, 2000: 5th Annual Iowa Local Food System Conference.

Location in central Iowa. (Snowdate: Feb. 5, 2000) Break into the millennium in local style! Plans are already under way for another wonderful winter gathering of the folks making it happen. Contact, Gary Guthrie at 515-382-3117.

Practical Farmer Field Days

Practical Farmers of Iowa is planning a series of summer and early autumn field days across the state.

Each year over thirty cooperators carry out on-farm research. The farmers collect data and analyze the results with the help of Iowa State University scientists. These trials often compare the cooperator's customary practices side-by-side with alternative practices. Farmers share the results of these trials at field days. Innovations found on PFI farms include weed management under reduced tillage, equipment modifications, certified organic production, agroforestry, and alternative models of beef, pork, and poultry production.

For a complete directory of the 1999 summer field days, contact Nan Bonfils at 2104 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, IA. 50011, (515) 294-8512, nanb@iastate.edu. Nan Bonfils Program Assistant, PFI, 2104 Agronomy Hall, ISU, Ames, IA 50011; tel.: 515-294-8512.

Call for Papers

The Rural Women's Studies Association invites proposals for individual papers, presentations, sessions, and workshops for its seventh triennial conference at the Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN, June 22-25, 2000. Deadline for submission of proposals is October 15, 1999.

Individual submissions should include a brief abstract and vita for each participant; full panel submissions should also include a session abstract. Electronic submissions are preferred. Submissions by mail should include four copies of each document. Submit proposals: Susan S. Rugh, History Department, 332 KMB Brigham Young University Provo, UT 84602-4446. Tel.: 801-378-2742; Email:

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 Extension, Ames, Iowa. We welcome suggestions, stories, and news from your part of the world. Our emphasis is on women's lives, their relationships, communities and families.

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The Rural Women's Studies Association, is an international association for the advancement of rural women's/gender studies in historical perspective. For information, contact Sarah Warren (stwarren@social.chass.ncsu.edu).

Books

● **The Paradox of Plenty**, Douglas H. Boucher (ed.), 1999. Examines new paradigms of food security, shifting focus from ability to produce enough food to issues of access to resources, equity and consumption. Looks at impact of global economy on global food systems. 342 pp. US\$18.95. Contact The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 398 60th St., Oakland, CA 94618; tel: 510-654-4400; fax: 510-654-4551; email foodfirst@igc.org; website www.foodfirst.org

● **Beyond Intellectual Property: Toward Traditional Resource Rights for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities**, 1996. Darrell A. Posey and Graham Dutfield. Offers ideas on how indigenous peoples and local communities worldwide can approach and deal with the issues surrounding intellectual property and traditional resource rights. Examines legally binding international agreements; soft law and non-binding international agreements; and community-based intellectual property rights and which are most effective in protecting indigenous people. Discusses topics such as plant germplasm and patenting of life. 303 pp. Canada \$30. Contact Renouf Publishing Co. Ltd., 5369 Canotek Rd., Unit 1, Ottawa, Ontario K1J9J3 Canada.

● **Corporate Predators: The Hunt for Mega-Profits and the Attack on Democracy**, by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, 1999. Collection of articles critiquing corporate power. Includes sections on corporate crime and violence, corporate attack on democracy, the search for "mega-profits," mergers, commercialism, sweatshops, union-busting. 192 pp. US\$12.95. Contact Common Courage Press, 1 Red Barn Road, Monroe, ME 14951; Tel: 207-525-0900; fax: 207-525-3068; email: info@commoncouragepress.com; website: www.commoncouragepress.com

● **Global Village or Global Pillage:**

Economic Reconstruction From the Bottom Up, Second Edition, by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, 1998. A basic introduction to the "globalization" of the economy. Looks at the "global race to the bottom" in which workers, communities and whole countries are forced to compete by lowering wages, working conditions, environmental protection standards and social spending. Highlights mounting worldwide resistance. US\$16. Contact South End Press, 7 Brookline St. 1, Cambridge, MA 02139-4146; email: southend@igc.org; website: www.lbbs.org/sep/sep.htm

● **Dark Victory: The United States and Global Poverty**, Second Edition, by Walden Bello. 1998. Looks at impacts of the North's strategy to dominate the international economy and reassert corporate control. Discusses consequences of removal of barriers to foreign investments, privatization of state-owned activities, reduction in social welfare spending, wage cuts and devaluation in local currencies. 162 pp. US\$14.95. Contact The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 398 60th St., Oakland, CA 94618; Tel: 510-654-4400; fax: 510-654-4551; email: foodfirst@igc.org; website: www.foodfirst.org.

(This list and descriptions is taken from Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA), 49 Powell St., Suite 500, San Francisco, CA 94102. Tel: 415-981-1771; fax: 415-981-1991; email: panna@panna.org Web: www.panna.org. To subscribe to PANUPS, send email to majordomo@igc.org with the following text on one line: subscribe panups.)

Websites

<http://digitaljournalist.org/contents.html> — This website is for photojournalism in the digital age. The July edition features Cynthia Vagnetti, who has crisscrossed 20 states visiting 27 farm families during the cycle of planting to harvesting. The feature, called *Gifts and Graces of the Land*, is on how the families are trying to keep their land productive in the era of corporate takeovers.

<http://www.thecampaign.org/> — The Campaign to Label Genetically Altered Foods. Mission Statement: "To create a national grassroots consumer campaign for the purpose of lobbying Congress and

the President to pass legislation that will require the labeling of genetically engineered foods in the United States."

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/> — the National Agricultural Library.

<http://www.attra.org> — Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA).

<http://www.sare.org> — Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE).

WFA Listserv

Over 30 members have joined the WFAN Listserv, an electronic discussion group established for WFAN members. WFAN-List is a closed, unmoderated list.

How do you join? If you are already a WFAN member, simply send a message to majordomo@iastate.edu. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, say subscribe wfan.

If you are not a WFAN member:

1. Fill out and return the membership form on the back of this newsletter

2. Support our mission and goals. Our mission is to link and amplify women's voices on issues of food systems, sustainable communities and environmental integrity. Our goals are to: (a) promote sustainable agricultural and community structures; (b) insist on social and ecological justice for current and future human and non-human communities; (c) 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; (d) 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; and (e) advocate change by exploring alternatives and challenging the globalization of economies, cultures of domination and institutionalized discrimination, the disintegration of landscapes, and oppressive conceptual frameworks.

3. Send a short introductory message to bwells@iastate.edu explaining your interest in women, food, agricultural, environmental or social justice issues.

The WTO Listening Sessions

Statements before the WTO Listening Session in Des Moines

Two Women, Food and Agriculture Network members presented statements to the WTO Listening Session held in Des Moines on July 12, 1999. Following are these statements by Greta Anderson and Clara Oleson preceded by their personal perspectives on the meeting.

Greta's Perspective:

Well, we did it!

Danielle and I crafted our statement until 'round midnight Sunday. Of course, the folks in charge of the program had put all the straights, suits, and pols first on the agenda: by the time Glickman, Grassley, Boswell, our USTR ag ambassador, and state ag secretaries had hit the rostrum we had to retarget our piece to blow their pabulum to pieces. Alas, few of these heavies were there to listen late in the afternoon when we had the chance to deliver our new, improved testimony. But listen we believe they did listen: Danielle said she saw them squirm; I saw Patty Judge smile a genuinely ironic smile as I delivered a piece of kick-ass logic.

Clara Oleson spoke, too (see statement next page). It was a speech that wove itself artfully between details that had a way of delivering punch lines below the belt. Her speech roused the audience to whopping applause. In all, the audience testimony was weighted with those who delivered pleas for rationality and humanity to the establishment, asking what is this God-given right to make the 96% (people in the world who are not US) buy our food? On the other hand, as Clara pointed out, it was the campaign contributors who made up the panels, the vast majority of all who spoke were men. Nonetheless, it was moving to be part of a democratic chorus, each with his or her own inflection and human plea.

Greta Anderson's Statement

My name is Greta Anderson and I am here with others representing the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network. Our network of women shares research and information on food systems, sus-

tainable communities, and environmental integrity. We welcome the opportunity to participate in this important forum.

As a preface, we believe that the World Trade Organization needs to seriously reconsider its mission in the context of the world's welfare. It has allowed neoliberal economic ideology and the goal of opening global markets to crowd out all other considerations. It has put trade and investment first, not people, not democracy, not life. And it has, through largely undemocratic means, gained the power to pursue its narrow goals at the hazard of these other, we believe, more essential, values.

We would pose the following three questions to refocus the priorities of the WTO as it concerns agriculture.

- Is free trade in the interests of the world's people?
- Is free trade in the interests of American farmers and rural communities?
- What is free trade doing to the earth's natural capital?

Free trade promotes an agriculture of overproduction. Midwest farmers are proud to be "feeding the world." While we share this pride in the glorious productivity of the land, we believe the mission of feeding the world, as much as it has become a mission, is fundamentally flawed. It is wrong to force others to depend on you for food. It is wrong to put indigenous farmers out of business.

The stories from the heartland are very moving. The same stories can be heard all over the world. If, as Secretary Glickman claims, overproduction is the cause of record low prices worldwide, then more free trade cannot be the answer. We must establish, and allow other countries to establish, policies that recognize that agriculture is a unique sector of the economy, rooted in place and dependent upon nature. (If we truly want the world to be fed, using surpluses to rebuild emergency crop reserves could be an important priority.)

Think about it: the corporate sponsors of the "feed the world" campaign create seeds that can't be saved. When US-based factory farms import large shipments of grain from South America, it

turns out "we are the world," after all. It is time farmers and politicians put aside the quasi-moral rhetoric. Our trade policies are not feeding the world; they are feeding the rich.

Which brings us to number 2: Is free trade in the interests of farmers and rural communities?

According to the USDA, US exports jumped 25% the first year of the WTO, to a record 55 billion. The following year, they were at roughly 60 billion. But it's a case of the tortoise and the hare. While exports have declined, imports have continued a steady growth. In terms of the agricultural trade balance, we're now behind where we were when we started in 1994 (1994: 17.3 billion ag trade surplus; 1998: 12.5 billion ag trade surplus). So let's have no more talk of "exports." Let's talk the bottom line: Exports AND imports, the agricultural trade balance.

Is free trade good for American farmers? The answer is no. Is it good for multinational corporations? It was invented for them and for those who invest in them. Record low crop prices bring record profits. So-called "free trade" is a case of capitalism for the poor, socialism for the rich.

We've talked about the tortoise and the hare. Let's talk about the goose that lays the golden egg. It's true, topsoil was once measured in feet. Not any more. It is not our Midwestern topsoil that is growing our crops. It is phosphorus mined from Florida, oil from the Middle East, water from the Ogalalla aquifer, and so on. With policies that encourage farming and trading by extraction, we run the risk of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. We need rational policy, policy that looks at the long run, that taxes resource depletion and pollution, that encourages us to build up our natural capital again. Invest in farmers and their stewardship of the land.

Finally, a word about "sound science" and GMOs. Technology and innovation is not the same thing as science. We challenge the USDA and FDA to prove there is "sound science" behind the approval of genetically modified crops. We aver that this process has been streamlined to avoid the difficult tests and trouble-shooting that such a revolutionary product should face. Once again,

we ask the question, who is profiting from this technology?

I would also like to mention organic crops as an important agricultural export. I have spoken to organic exporters who say our reputation abroad is being damaged by this insistence on GMOs...so lay off.

Clara's Perspective

No food, no drink. No food, no drink. Not in the morning, not in the afternoon. By three o'clock even the speaker's table was devoid of water. State vehicles acting as taxis would take you anywhere you wanted for lunch, no return trip guaranteed however. A day spent talking about agricultural trade policies conducted in involuntary fasting. Iowa may be told she can feed the world but when the Secretary of Agriculture can't even organize a coffee break, well one has one's doubts. The speaker's table was dominated by elected politicians and representatives of corporate agriculture, who were given by the Chamber of Commerce facilitator the most voice time. A vocal audience critic early in the day managed to get the audience speakers to at least sit at the table of speakers (inaccessible for people in wheelchairs) for the 3 minutes they were allotted to speak. The "listening panel" sat quietly, Glickman was in attendance for approximately two hours, and the main messages were as follows:

- Europe, particularly France, relies on bad science and too many subsidies for its farmers to the detriment of world trade.
- Biotechnology is inexorable and beneficial.
- Increased exports are mandatory for the benefit of agricultural producers, except increased free trade will not, alone, solve the agricultural crisis.
- Low prices are driving farmers from land production that has been in the family for generations.

The first three points were delivered, in varying degrees of sophistication, by Glickman, the politicians, large agribusiness representatives and most commodity trade association speakers. The last by an assortment of men, mostly over fifty-five, looking, to me, like displaced MidWestern steelworkers. There were enough variations on the above to rivet

one's anger and interest. The last point moved one's heart to tears as it was eloquently articulated by personal stories of hardship. The power of multi-national corporate agribusiness was in one's face all day. Whether it was the remembrance of the campaign contributions of the industry funneled to the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture or to Governor Vilsack for his inauguration expenses or the smoothness of the IBP presentation, delivered by the best dressed dude of the day with no sign of the blood of injured workers on his white cuffs. A reaffirmation day: the struggle over the present domination of the legal, social, economic and human conditions of the production and distribution of food is a fight against mammoth economic interests. But since they cannot even manage to provide food and drink to a few hundred people for one day, this irony, coupled with the eloquent witness of the dispossessed created a rededication to the cause of a just and humane agricultural system.

Clara Oleson's Statement

My name is Clara Oleson. I am a national board member of the Alliance for Democracy, a membership organization with chapters in 23 states working to restore economic and political democracy. Thank you for meeting in one of Iowa's most important public places, our State Historical Society, a tribute to Iowans' commitment to preserve our history and maintain the values of our heritage.

That heritage of independent landowners, hardworking men and women creating opportunities for their children is now in shambles throughout this region. Look beyond the cornstalks, see this:

- Iowa is 42nd in wages in the nation
- A telemarketing firm, APAC, is the 3rd largest private employer in the state; a grocery staffed by teenagers, HyVee, is the largest.
- Thomas Jefferson's ideals are ill served by the nearly half of Iowa farmers who are tenants
- We are exploited by IBP who tolerates double the worker injury rate in an industry that is the most dangerous in America.

Our problem in this region is price: price of the corn and soybeans we grow, price of our labor, price of the hogs we

raise. Stop the corporate feeding frenzy of our labor and our land, air and water.

We are wasted by the "externalities" of factory farming: its hog shit, its 12 hour work days, its campaign financing, its low wages. We are ravaged by its continued demands for corporate welfare: ADM milks ethanol; Cargill, with no shame, well, ask them about Eddyville.

Romanticized by the media, unknown by the vast majority of Americans, we struggle. Wall Street, not Main Street is booming, and our pursuit of happiness is fearful and doubtful of success, especially for our children.

Capitalists are good at raising capital. If they were attuned to global excess capacity, their profits might be more realistically secure. They do not make democracy: look at Singapore. They do not engender economic justice or equality: look at Bill Gates or Mr. Greenspan's crony relationship with hedge fund operators. They do not weave a social fabric into responsible stewardship and trust: look at the fear of agribusiness to tell us about GMOs and the nitrate levels in our water. They do not feed the 34 million Americans which the USDA tell us are "food insecure" or the 2 billion in the world who are starving or the 46,000 Iowa children who go to bed hungry at night.

Farmers and workers, their families and communities are not global commodities. Look, see, feel, and comprehend: we are human beings. Our personhood, our communities are under attack from agribusinesses that have as much wealth as dozens of independent nations.

These are harsh realities, the realities of the rural ghetto you are visiting. Go to Seattle, enjoy the espresso, but be haunted by the voices of the real creators of wealth on this earth, farmers and workers, and do not sleep at night without their desires for fairness and equity weaving their ways into your hearts and your souls. We expect you, the rules negotiators, to do nothing less.

(Clara left a box of back up materials with those listening to the testimony and asked them to read it.)



Poetry, Farm and the Land

Over This Soil: An Anthology of World Farm Poems

edited by Catherine Webster.
University of Iowa Press, 168 pp., \$12.95.

Review by Greta Anderson <squirrel@inav.net>

This is the second of Webster's collections of farm poems; the first, *Handspan of Red Earth*, anthologized only U.S.-authored poems. In *Over This Soil*, a couple dozen U.S. farm poems rub elbows with poems from Europe, Asia, Central and South America, Africa, and Australia. This makes it more interesting than its predecessor.

The best poems propose some sense

of cooperation between food producer and nature. In Ellen Bryant Voigt's "Farm Wife," the character watches the earth "open" with her husband's plough. At her death, the soil will "seal its black mouth like a scar." Framed in a doorway between life and death, the figure "in her long gloves of flour . . . turns like the moon toward the sea-black field" (what happens to her next is a surprise).

In a poem from Kenya, nature's strange grip comes in the guise of a leopard whose sexual energy seems to pervade the speaker's fields and huts. Georgiana Voloyce-Sanchez's poem, "The Fat of the Land," meditates on the phrase that her parents use to eulogize what turns out to be poor, but beloved ground in their Indian Reservation homeland.

There are numerous other notable poems, including one by Pablo Neruda castigating the United Fruit Company.

An outcry of hunger from the Korean countryside wastes no words: "Ah, I'm so unbearably hungry / I could eat money." In all, the collection suggests the universality of the struggle of the world's providers. It also awakens our curiosity with the specific glimpses we get of real worlds far different from our own.

Also recommended:

An American Mosaic: Poetry and Prose by Everyday Folk (Oxford University Press, \$17.95), a Free River Press anthology edited by Robert Wolf. Over the past dozen years, Wolf has conducted "writing workshops" for farmers and rural townies in northeastern Iowa and published the work in small anthologies. Before that, Wolf published the homeless in Nashville. Here, he reprints the best of their narratives and poems. The authenticity of the voices is provocative and moving.

The WTO: What Is It ?

(WTO, continued from page 1)

the event in Seattle. In order to deepen our understanding about how world trade issues effect our lives, the fall meeting of WFAN will do a training session on the WTO. The issue of WTO is an international issue with strong impact on rural communities in this country and around the world.

For more information, contact the following organizations:

Public Citizen, 1600 20th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009; tel: 202-588-1000; <http://www.citizen.org/pctrade/gattwto/gatthome.html>.

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 2105 1st Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55404; tel: 612-870-0453; fax: 612-870-4846; <http://www.iatp.org/>.

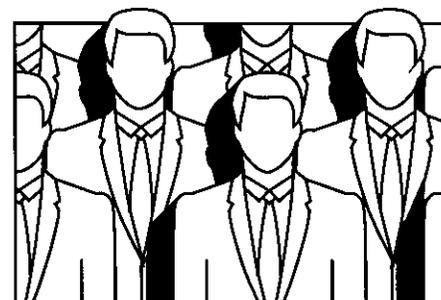
World Trade Organization, 154 rue de Lausanne, 1211 Geneva 21, Switzerland; tel: (41 22) 739 51 11; <http://wto.org>.

The Unbalanced WTO: Women Need Not Apply:

Of the 159 member WTO dispute panelist, 147 are men (92.5%) and 12 are women (7.5%). Following is the breakdown. None of the seven members appointed to the WTO appellate body are women. Only one of 59 EU appointees is a woman. Of the 39 panelists appointed to the dispute resolutions, 38 are men and one is a woman.

Country	Women	Men	Country	Women	Men
Australia	3	15	Denmark	0	1
Germany	0	7	Japan	0	10
Netherlands	0	5	Egypt	1	1
Austria	0	4	United Kingdom	0	7
Greece	0	2	Korea	0	6
New Zealand	0	7	Finland	0	4
Belgium	0	2	Venezuela	0	2
Hong Kong	0	5	Mauritius	0	1
Norway	0	3	France	1	3
China			Total:	12	147
Chile	1	3			
Spain	0	1			
India	2	10			
Colombia	1	4			
Sweden	0	11			
Ireland	0	3			
Cuba	0	1			
Switzerland	2	8			
Israel	0	6			
Czech Rep.	0	2			
United States	1	9			
Italy	0	4			

Source— U.S. Trade Representative



Another Meeting: Detroit and the National Town Meeting

What we did

by Danielle Wirth

The Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN), with the help of Mary Steinmaus and the Stanley Foundation, sent four delegates to Detroit for the National Town Meeting sponsored by the President's Commission on Sustainable Development. WFAN's workshop featured Mary Steinmaus presenting the history of WFAN and our Kellogg-Foundation-supported microenterprise initiative, Danielle Wirth providing a conceptual overview of the relationship between enterprise and community development, and Maggie Howe and Gail Hutchison explaining their farm-based operations.

Maggie Howe and Gail Hutchison told their stories with candor, grace, good humor and passion. They were fantastic!

Gail talked about the transitions of a small livestock producer from "traditional" management that ignores natural estrus cycles and use of prime pasture to a more holistic system that produces healthier, happier sheep, higher quality fleece. Gail is involved with every facet of her wool production from sheep herding, medical care, pasture management, processing the wool to the finished product. She markets through the Internet as well as through other sources.

Maggie Julseth Howe has a partnership business with her Mom, Donna Julseth. PrairieLand Herbs is a home-grown business combining a retail shop with an active and growing mail-order business. Maggie and Donna grow and process garden crops, herbs and flowers into teas, relishes, jams and jellies. They also create and market their own line of herbal healing salves, bath salts, bath and body oils and much more. They're building a new shop using the latest energy-efficient techniques. They market other locally grown and crafted products too.

They "did us proud" in Detroit. Several of the participants made a point of telling us that this was the best programs they'd attended during the whole conference and that they were wishing that there had been more programs like ours. Very nice compliments!

What it was like

by Gail Hutchison

Besides presenting our own workshop, we representatives of WFAN went to as many workshops as we could fit into our schedules and collected more information from display tables than we will ever have time to read. This was my first foray into the politics of sustainable development and my first experience with politics at the national level. What follows are my impressions that I am still filtering.

*Our survival,
both individually
and as a group,
and our ability to influence
the way food is produced
may depend on
the allies we make
and the political voices
we raise.*

I was immediately struck by the irony of having a town meeting on sustainable development whose major sponsors were Chrysler-Daimler, Ford, and Dow Chemical. In the hangar-sized display room, roughly 2/3 of the space was taken by large corporations (mainly automotive displays featuring electric cars) and government agencies including the military. I was also bemused by the idea of holding a discussion on production processes that failed to include farmers, workers or unions, and growers co-ops.

The number of workshops to choose among were vast. Many were directed at cities attempting to change individual behavior in the use of resources and dealt with such issues as public transportation, waste management, and energy use. A few dealt with macro-level problems such as the changing nature of the Mexico/US border.

The workshops I attended were for the most part focused on grass roots non-governmental efforts to reclaim resources or to produce goods and services that

were good for nature and people. Group were ingenious in figuring out new ways of moving people around cities on bicycles, recycling wasted energy, reclaiming abandoned people and city lots, developing organic restaurants that combined on site gardens and consumer education, or in developing new ways of telling our national and economic "story".

Political rhetoric to the contrary, most of these efforts had uphill battles with local bureaucracies. Organic restaurants had problems with health departments who required the use of toxic cleaning materials. Community gardens that were rebuilding soil and providing neighborhood education and skill building centers would often have their garden lots reclaimed by the city to become parking lots.

Noticeably absent was a discussion of the politics leading to the kind of production processes that result in the damage the town meeting was trying to address. Most of the workshops were focused on reclaiming or fixing the damage already done rather than promoting new ways of producing goods and services.

At first I was overwhelmed at the speed with which the very corporations and organizations that have made sustainability questionable have coopted the language of sustainability. On the other hand, it may be encouraging that the market share and public concern for sustainable production is large enough that we are being noticed.

As seductive as the conference was, there were vocal objections to the bland self-congratulations by corporate speakers and politicians during keynote addresses. Those of us who are concerned with organic and sustainable production on the land are no longer invisible. We are, however, the target of policies and regulations at all levels that make it difficult for small producers to continue while the language of our efforts is being stolen and corrupted. Our survival, both individually and as a group, and our ability to influence the way food is produced may depend on the allies we make and the political voices we raise.

**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.

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