

# Women, Food & Agriculture Network

## Community Supported Agriculture: A Woman-Friendly Enterprise

by Betty Wells and Shelly Gradwell

Our research — Betty's on women in agriculture and Shelly's on CSAs — converged several years ago as we observed more women than men among Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) growers in Iowa. This trend has held steady. In 1999, women were the main grower or full partner in 34 of 51 CSAs (67%), 27 of 40 (68%) in 1998, and 19 of 27 (70%) in 1997. Our research aims to explain this notable pattern in a state where men generally dominate agriculture. We conclude that CSA is woman-friendly: scale-appropriate, economically accessible, and congruent with the experiences, priorities, and values of many women.

We base our conclusion on numerous interactions with CSA growers in Iowa and interviews between 1996 and 1998 with 21 CSA growers (19 women and 2 men) from various regions of the state. We asked how their CSA interest and practice developed, and whether women play a unique role within the CSA movement.

Most CSA production systems are small-scale, labor intensive operations with low capital investment. Some are

described as gardens, others as farms. CSAs can operate within the confines of what is considered in Iowa to be a conventional farming operation. Even when part of a larger farming operation, CSAs constitute an independent enterprise. Some growers work individually, while others find mutual support and member-benefit in a system or network of growers, such as the Magic Beanstalk CSA in central Iowa or the Local Harvest CSA in eastern Iowa.

Because of low start-up costs and seasonal production, CSA offers opportunities for small-scale, beginning, and part-time farmers. Most CSA farms produce vegetables, but mid-sized producers, especially of livestock, find a supplemental value-added market for animal products such as meat, eggs, and wool. Opportunities abound for on-farm diversification. In the case of larger conventional farms, this may mean adding a vegetable enterprise.

Most growers see a connection between gender and CSA, but interpretations vary. One grower answers without hesitation:

### Mission

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

(continued on page 6)



## Calendar

**June 6-10: Practical Farmers of Iowa Youth Camp.** Boone, IA. Contact Shelly Gradwell: 515-294-0887; Shellyg@iastate.edu.

**June 22-25: Rural Women's Studies Association.** Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN. Contact: Ann McCleary, amcclear@westga.edu. or Deb Fink: afink@iastate.edu.

**July 15-16: WFAN Summer Meeting.** Mason City. Look for mailing.

**July 16-20: 17th Annual North America Prairie Conference.** Mason City. Contact: Carol Schutte: 515-422-4319; schutcar@niacc.cc.ia.us.

**August 10-20: Iowa State Fair, Local Foods Systems Display.** Contact Jan Libbey: 515-295-6367; libland@frontier.net.com. Iowa State Fair information: info@iowastatefair.org

### WFAN Summer Meeting

WFAN's summer gathering will be held from 1:00 p.m. Saturday, July 15, until 1:00 p.m. Sunday, July 16, Mason City, Iowa, just prior to the North American Prairie Conference that starts Sunday evening, July 16.

Our special focus will be on the impact of large-scale hog confinement operations on the rural community neighborhood. An optional Sunday work afternoon on Jan Libby's CSA is planned.

WFAN members will receive details in mid June. Others may obtain information by contacting Denise O'Brien: wfan@nishna.net or 712-243-3264.

If interested in attending the Prairie Conference hosted by North Central Iowa Community College, check the web site, [www.niacc.com/prairie2000/](http://www.niacc.com/prairie2000/). Lodging options include hotels, college dorm rooms, and bed and breakfasts. For more information contact Carol Schutte at NIACC: tel.: 515-422-4319; email: schutcar@niacc.cc.ia.us.

WFAN will join women from Minnesota and Wisconsin for a tri-state conference the weekend of Nov. 10-12 at a location around the tri-state boundaries. Mark your calendars. For questions or to contribute your ideas, contact Stacey Brown at 712-243-3264.

## Resources

### Iowa Network for Community Agriculture

The Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA) has speakers available to give presentations to community, church, and civic groups on issues of community supported agriculture (CSA), organic production, the importance of growing and buying food locally, etc.

For more information on our Speakers Bureau, please contact Jan Libbey at 515-495-6367; libland@frontiernet.net.

For information about speakers for church groups, please contact Rev. Jay Robinson, INCA Religious Outreach Coordinator, at 515-961-9791 or robinjl@storm.simpson.edu.

### Resources from the Iowa Environmental Council

The Iowa Environmental Council has prepared position papers and factsheets on the following important legislative issues: water quality monitoring, the Governor's Clean Water Initiative, livestock manure management, REAP, the Bottle Bill, and electric utility deregulation. The position papers are available on the Council's web site at <http://www.earthweshare.org>, or call Tommi Makila at 515-244-1194 to receive copies.

The Iowa Environmental Council is located at 711 East Locust Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309; tel: 515-244-1194; email: [iecmal@earthweshare.org](mailto:iecmal@earthweshare.org); web-site: <http://www.earthweshare.org>.

### Center for Rural Affairs

The Center for Rural Affairs, a non-profit organization committed to building communities that stand for social justice, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship, has the following publications available:

**Reshaping the Institutions that are Shaping the Food System** - examines how to initiate effective institutional change.

**The Splice of Life (Science, that is): Implications of Genetic Engineering for Family Farmers, Consumers and the Environment** - examines the impli-

### 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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cations of biotechnology and outlines 11 recommendations for its use.

**A Time to Act, the Second Report Card**, on USDA's response to the National Commission on Small Farms recommendations, two years later, finds the agency's response mixed.

The Center also has a regular newsletter, a voice for reinvigorating small businesses, family farming and ranching, and rural communities. Contact: The Center of Rural Affairs, PO Box 406, Walthill, NE 68067-0406; tel: 402-846-5428; email: info@cfra.org; website: <http://www.cfra.org>.

## ISU Extension

ISU University Extension has brochures on the following:

Late Season Perennial Flowers  
Clematis  
Daylilies  
Ornamental Grasses with Winter Interest  
Nonchemical Pest Control for the Home Lawn and Garden  
Guidelines for Selecting Trees  
Gardening for Butterflies  
Horticulture Publications and much more

For more information on vegetables, fruits, house plants, pest management, grass and flowers, contact your local County Extension office or call the Horticultural Hotline 1-515-294-3108

## WEDO

The Women's Environment and Development Organization has information on women's involvement in global issues such as the environment and the economy. See <http://www.igc.org/wedo/>.

## Websites

**Iowa Commission on the Status of Women:** <http://www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/index.html>.

**Member Sue Andersen's CSA website:** <http://members.xoom.com/goodearthcsa>

**ISU Extension Sustainable Ag website** features a calendar of sustainable agriculture events, news items, links to other sustainable agriculture web pages, sustainable agriculture contacts for Iowa, and more. Visit the site at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/sustag/>.

<http://www.purefood.org> - Organic Consumers Association

<http://www.foodfirst.org> - Food First

<http://panna.org> - Pesticide Action Network

**Websites on global economics, the World Bank and the IMF:**

<http://www.a16.org>  
<http://Religiouswg.org>  
<http://50years.org>  
<http://worldbank.org>  
<http://j2000usa.org>

## News Briefs

### US Patent on Neem Revoked

by *The Times of India News Service*

NEW DELHI: After six years of legal battles, the controversial neem patent has been revoked. This is the second patent, after turmeric, which has been revoked.

At the conclusion of a two-day proceeding, the European Patent Office revoked the neem patent, granted to the US Department of Agriculture and the multinational corporation, W.R. Grace.

The patent was for a fungicide derived from the seeds of the neem tree. The legal opposition to the patent was lodged about five years ago by Research Foundation, headed by environmental activist, Vandana Shiva.

The panel judged that there was no inventive step involved as neem has traditionally been used as a fungicide, Ms. Shiva said. The neem patents are a clear case of piracy of Indian indigenous knowledge.

"We were certain from the beginning that the US patent did not satisfy the basic requirements for a patent. How could they say they invented something which has been in public use for centuries and on which modern scientific research has been carried out in the country for decades."

The president of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement, Linda Bullard, who also fought the legal battle, stated, "This is a great day not only for us but for all people throughout the world, especially for the Third World, who have been fighting to take back control of their resources and knowledge systems from the patent

regimes of the north."

According to Shiva, the revocation of this patent has important implications for the cases of biopiracy and for amendments in India's patent laws.

### Women at Center of Global Economy

by *International Women's Tribune Center*

As the negative impacts of globalization become increasingly apparent around the world, women are working together to represent themselves in the global economy.

● **The Gender and Trade Network** was formed at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Meeting in Seattle to research gender and trade relations, form regional gender and trade networks to advocate for change, and to help women understand and become involved in economic issues. Contact Maria Riley at [mriley@coc.org](mailto:mriley@coc.org) or Lynda Yanz, [perg@web.net](mailto:perg@web.net).

● **Funders Network on Trade and Globalization** was formed following the WTO meeting in Seattle to raise awareness among foundations of the relevance of globalization in their grant making. This new network of funders is reaching out to the funding community through a website and a briefing book which will be available July 2000.

● The Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ) has a "Declaration for Economic Justice and Women's Empowerment" which will be used as an advocacy tool. To add your organization's signature, contact MADRE, 121 West 27th St., 301, New York, NY 10001; tel: 212-627-0444; email: [madre@igc.org](mailto:madre@igc.org).

*(This article is edited from International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC) Women's GlobalNet, an email listserv production of the IWTC, 777 United Nations Plaza, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10017; tel: 212-687-8633; email: [iwtc@iwtc.org](mailto:iwtc@iwtc.org). You can subscribe to the list by sending a blank message to [iwtc-womensglobalnet-subscribe@igc.topica.com](mailto:iwtc-womensglobalnet-subscribe@igc.topica.com).*

*IWTC also publishes WOMEN, INK, a catalogue of publications on women and development by, for and about women worldwide. See Women, Ink's catalogue at <http://www.womenink.org>.)*

# The Impact of Biotechnology Discussed at WFAN Meeting

by Danielle Wirth

Dr. Martha Crouch was the invited guest speaker for WFAN's spring gathering at a time when debate over genetically modified organisms (GMOs) rages in electronic and print media. Marti was invited to share her experience on the subject since much of her professional life involved research in related areas.

Educated at Yale to do "pure" science, Marti was a rising star in the cutting-edge research that peered into the minute workings of genes. In the 1980's, Crouch studied canola seeds in a large laboratory where she managed graduate students who did research under her guidance.

It is the ethical scientist who questions the application and outcome of his or her research. That is what Marti did in the early 90's, and shortly thereafter she quit her tenured position at Indiana University to devote her attention to alerting a wider community about the dangers of biotechnology.

Shortly after science broke into plant seeds to learn their secrets, biotech firms began to develop and co-opt the research for big business and big agriculture. The new research was directed towards "the one perfect food concept." Biologically altered crops began to be grown next to

traditional crops and small farms. Given the potential impact on crops in neighboring fields, Crouch believes that the new technology is actually an assault on non-altered crops since it is impossible, despite the claims by biotech companies and universities, to wall off fields and separate one part of agriculture from another.

Crouch talked about "Golden Rice," a genetically modified rice that contains Vitamin A. It is supported by Monsanto and by our own USDA. To accomplish the genetic transformation of ordinary rice into "Golden Rice," three daffodil genes are shotgunned into rice to increase iron and beta carotenes. The resulting bio-altered or GMO rice requires heavy doses of pesticides.

The arguments used to support the development and raising of golden rice include the harmful effects of Vitamin A deficiency suffered by many people in the developing world. But, activists and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) believe the rice is a Trojan Horse for a system that will undermine local agriculture and hence, local food security. The cost to supply Vitamin A worldwide would be \$.40 cents per person.

Crouch discussed complementarity.

Human diets are best when they come from a variety of sources — not the one "perfect food." Variety in food provides the essential vitamins, amino acids, proteins and carbohydrates needed for optimum health.

Crouch charged that monoculture in cropping systems leads to loss of cultural diversity as well. It is widely known that in the Vavlovian zones surrounding the equatorial and subequatorial regions of the planet, the plant and animal diversity is the greatest. World Watch Institute relates that over 60 percent of the earth's biological diversity reside in these regions. Interestingly enough, where there is the most biological diversity, there also seems to be the most cultural diversity.

We could have listened to Marti Crouch for days longer. She was full of facts, figures and .. most important for an activist - passion. It was a privilege to participate in this discussion. Marti's vilification by agricultural colleges and biotech companies is reminiscent of the demonization of Rachel Carson by the chemical companies of the 60's when "Silent Spring" made it to publication.

## The New Organic Rules: Some Good and Some Left Out

by Katy Hansen

A new set of National Organic Standards was submitted for comments last March for a 90 day comment period. Most seem to agree that it is a vast improvement from the original set issued in December 1997, which resulted in thousands of comments. But, still others feel more improvements are needed.

The revised rules do set minimum standards and prohibit the usage of sewage sludge, irradiation, genetically engineered organisms, and antibiotics. They set up the authority for certification with private and state programs under licenses from the US Department of Agriculture. (USDA).

Improvements could be made in the processes set up for certification, howev-

er. Elizabeth Hendersen says, "The rule allows states to have additional or higher standards than the NOP (National Organic Program of USDA), but private certifiers will have to certify to the NOP standards."

There are also loopholes that could allow livestock to be kept in confinement and rules that would make start-up in organic dairy herds unattainable.

Omissions include no standard or liability for drift of GEOs from neighboring fields, no definitions for organic agriculture or ionizing radiation and other terms, and no procedure for genetic technology review or the selection of the National Organic Standards Board.

Implementation of the rules will raise the cost of certification to organic farm-

ers thus forcing small organic farmers to become bigger or get out. WFAN member Sue Andersen says, "...unless government funds appear, [it will] creat[e] economic hardship for already economically-struggling small farms and small certifying agencies."

For more information see <http://www.purefood.org>. The deadline for comments is June 12, 2000. To read the proposed rules and submit comments via the website, see <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>.

To submit comments by regular mail, refer to docket number: TMD-00-02-PR2 and send to Keith Jones, National Organic Program, USDA-AMS-TMP-NOP, Rm 2945-So., PO Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456. By fax, send to 703-365-0760.

# Do you know who grows your food? In Northeast Iowa, it may be:

by Linda Nash

Recently I attended a workshop on value-added farm marketing. The bio accompanying the seminar write-up stated that the farm owners giving the workshop lived in rural northwest Illinois, and I was interested to hear about their operation and their marketing plans.

During the first few minutes of their talk, they complained that there was no way they could possibly make a living in their own area, but that “fortunately” they were “only” two and a half hours away from Chicago, and so all their farm products were sold there. How disappointing to look forward to a talk on a rural family farm, and instead hear about selling in Chicago!

There is a common conception that while it is great to get away from it all, and live in the “country,” you still need the cities to have any kind of market for your farm’s produce/products. Our farm is living proof that it is not only possible, but very satisfying to not only LIVE in the country, but SELL in the country.

Our farm is situated in the southern half of the most northeastern county of Iowa. We have just one stop-light in our county, and it doesn’t even run all the time. At differing times, it will change to flashing red and yellow at the four corners in the county seat of Waukon. The population of Waukon, our biggest town by far, is around 5,000, and although we have some small industry, agriculture is the basis of the economy. It is about one and a half to two hours to the nearest “city” — Rochester, MN to the north, Cedar Rapids, IA to the south, or LaCrosse, WI to the northeast. But, we are not really too concerned about how far away they are because everything produced on our farm is sold within a 30 mile radius.

How is this possible? Who are the customers? Doesn’t everyone in the area have their own garden?

To answer the last question first —

## SUNFLOWER FIELDS FAMILY FARM & CSA



“No, not everyone has a garden, not by a long shot.” But what many people in the area do have is a memory of having a kitchen garden when they were growing up, and how fresh the food was that came from that garden. We have an even mix of “town” folks and farmers in the CSA, and in general, the main reason they give for joining is the freshness and flavor of real homegrown goodness.

For those who may not know — CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. This is a system whereby members receive a weekly delivery of produce, called a “share,” for 20 or more weeks throughout the growing season. There is a payment to the farm at the beginning of the year, and an agreement to take whatever comes along, and to take the chances that the farmer takes because of weather or other problems.

It’s a simple idea, really - the residents of our area are buying food, and farmers in our area are growing food — why shouldn’t the people who live here eat what is grown here? And yet it seems somehow radical, because most of the farms around do not produce for human consumption. They plant commodity crops for sale outside the area.

Besides the CSA, our farm has a second local marketing operation, this one in a cooperative with 10 other growers. Together we deliver over a five county area to five hospitals, eight nursing homes, two restaurants, and the local community college.

This is not really the easiest way to run a farm. We grow over 50 different crops, and make deliveries 5-6 days a week. We have a lot of billing and paperwork plus we provide a weekly two-page newsletter with recipes and other infor-

mation on the produce.

But it’s our idea of what a family farm can be — growing “real food for real people” and knowing that in our small way, we can make a difference in our local communities.

*(Linda and Michael Nash, Owners and Operators, Sunflower Fields Family Farm & CSA, 776 Old Stage Road Postville, Iowa, 52162; 319-864-3847, e-mail: sunspot@netins.net.)*

### Why Buy Organic?

*(adapted from Why Buy Organic? by Urban Organics, Vancouver BC; <http://www.urbanorganics.com/>)*

When you purchase organic food, you change what appears on your dinner table. You are also using the power of your dollar to change society and the way we manage our food systems. Using organic food helps to:

- increase the flavor of your food
- protect you and your children from the chemicals used in traditional agriculture
- support an economy that does not have the hidden costs of chemical regulation, hazardous waste disposal and cleanup, and other environmental costs

The methods of farming generally used by organic farmers help to:

- prevent soil erosion.
- protect water quality
- save energy
- promote biodiversity
- protect farm workers from harmful chemicals

# Community supported Agriculture: A Woman-Friendly Enterprise

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“Who is initiating most of the CSAs? Where comes much of my hope, but from the consciousness that it is women’s voices who are so often instrumental in shaping this type of food system – one that is much more whole and comprehensive. The system I am opting out of is driven by men. It is no coincidence.”

Some see something special about women’s perspectives and ways of knowing the world. They credit women with ways of processing information, making decisions, managing power, and working with people that are essential for sustainable agriculture and sustainable living.

“Women bring different points of view. Women think differently. They can see a different angle. I think of shading a row with the plant that will grow. My husband is not worried what that plant is going to be like, just get the weeds out. Women tend to be easier on things. I can go out and delicately hand pick a row without any problem. I enjoy doing that. I can pull weeds all day. Men, in general, are not hand-picking kind of people, whereas women are at times. That is the kind of tender loving care a garden needs.”

Some see merely an extension of an historical trend where women managed the garden, poultry and dairy enterprises. Others note the compatibility of raising food and raising children. CSA-scale and methods of production are child-friendly, much less dangerous than large-scale and mechanized conventional agriculture. Several growers started CSAs in order to earn a living while staying on the farm and involving children, or being with elder parents.

CSA is often not viewed as farming, notes one grower. Women are identified with the garden, men with the farm; gardening is socially typed as feminine, farming as masculine. Female farmers (and male gardeners) are “different” observes one grower whose husband is a typical male farmer, but her dad a gardener. A grower whose CSA is part of her independent farming operation – self-

described as “a female farmer, not from here” – finds freedom in being different. Being less confined by local social norms, she is better able to innovate on her farm. CSA growers, willing to be and try something different, serve as models to other prospective CSA growers. Several growers have influenced their farming partners to move toward more sustainable practices. In CSA, as else-

## What is a CSA

CSA as defined by Gradwell, S., J. DeWitt, D. Mayerfeld, R. Salvador, and J. Libbey (1999) in *Community Supported Agriculture: Local Food Systems for Iowa*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Extension, Pm-1692:

“. . . a partnership between farmers and community members working together to create a local food system. CSA farmers may produce fresh vegetables, fruits, meats, fiber, and related products directly for local community members. CSA differs from direct marketing in that its members commit to a full-season price in the spring, sharing the risks of production. With this upfront support, farmers can concentrate on growing quality food and caring for the land. In return, members know where their food comes from and how it is grown; they share a connection to the land and farmers who feed them. CSA establishes a direct economic and social link between farmers and community members.”

The number of CSAs in the United States continues to grow from an estimated 635 in 1996 to over 1,000 in 1999. In Iowa, at least 51 farmers grew for 34 CSAs in 1999. Of these CSAs, three started during the 1995 growing season, six in the 1996 season, five in 1997, 11 in 1998, and 9 in 1999.

where in agriculture, women are influencing the trend toward sustainability.

CSA in rural Iowa combines elements of gardening and elements of farming. Most Iowa CSAs are from 1 to 5 acres in size, a scale requiring more “farmer-like” thinking. Unlike conventional farming, much CSA work is done by hand. However, appropriate mechanization and

efficient methods of planting, cultivating, and harvesting are required for CSA-scale production. Vegetable growing in particular, at least in Iowa, is an “equal opportunity employer,” affordable and scale-appropriate.

A grower who has farmed with her husband in a conventional operation describes CSA as comfortable and accessible – a woman-friendly combination. Her comfort comes from “more women to work with and more men who are used to working with women.” CSA is accessible to women on conventional farms seeking additional income through diversification including those who desire their own enterprise or autonomy. Women manage all independent CSA enterprises on conventional farms that we identified. CSA also helps aspiring women farmers who lack the experience, land and capital to gain a foothold. The blurring of traditional boundaries between male/female and farming/gardening in CSA creates a niche for women.

Relationship is a theme woven throughout the interviews. Growers speak of closing the gap between grower and eater, and between people and nature; of land, plants and animals as community members, not commodities; and of moving from control of nature to partnership. Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1993:7) sees “a way of relating to the other that is especially associated with women, which contains the seeds of a different human relationship to the earth . . .” Fortunately, as one male CSA grower reminds us, this way of relating is not the exclusive property of women:

“When I was growing up, I developed a stronger feminine side than some other males. I remember hearing the women talking about relationships and getting along. My father would be talking about the price of corn and beans. I thought, ‘Man, that’s boring!’ I was much more attracted to my mother’s conversations with friends. So relationships were important to me growing up. I think the main difference in CSA is that females are more interested in relationships and cooperative ventures.”

(continued on next page)

This may explain women's affinity with CSA. They excel at the CSA grower and member- shareholder partnership. Members are mostly women too. Shareholders support growers' resource management practices, which become visible as growers and members interact. The growers see how their produce is used and get immediate feedback – unlike the supermarket. By buying CSA produce, shareholders contribute financial support thus ensuring fair profit for farmers. Some shareholders also contribute by working on the farm.

Although many growers use organic techniques, this people-connection distinguishes CSAs from organic non-CSA farms.

“Part of the value in growing things organically is you're not harming the earth, and the creatures on the earth. What CSA seems to have over that is a cooperative spirit, focusing more on cooperation with nature and with people.”

They enhance their partnership with nature by avoiding chemicals, incorporating insect habitat, making a place for weeds, and even accepting wildlife in their production system.

“In CSA, people develop a relationship with the grower and the land, with a specific place.”

CSA is a people-friendly, nature-friendly, woman-friendly agriculture. The blurring of traditional boundaries between male/female and farming/gardening in CSA creates a niche for women and is full of human potential.

“Our biggest challenge in CSA is to integrate the strengths of women and men in a way that allows all to more fully experience their human potential. I sense within the CSA movement people are free to be more fully who they really are. That's so consistent – it's as healthy as the food.”

CSA moves us beyond gender stereotypes while validating women's historical strengths.

## Rally for Rural America

by Denise O'Brien

As plans for a national rally by farmers, The Rally for Rural America, began to unfold last winter, it became clear to me that it was time for the Women, Food and Agriculture Network to make an appearance on Capitol Hill.

The stage was set one cold day in January when I was in Des Moines endorsing a health care plan proposed by the Bradley campaign. A friend arranged for me to meet with Representative George Miller from the Oakland, California area.

Representative Miller was a captive audience. He had no staff telling him it was time for his next appointment nor did he have a cell phone — he was a good listener and I was the honored speaker. We talked for an hour about issues of organic and sustainable agriculture and about the role of women. Near the end of our time he asked me if rural women had ever spoken with the Women's Caucus in Congress. I told him not to my knowledge but that it would be a great opportunity to do so. Before he left, he said he would have his staff arrange a meeting.

A month later I got in touch with Representative Miller's office and suggested that March 20th would be a good time to meet with the women of Congress because many farm women would be in Washington attending the Rally for Rural America. I next heard from Representative Nancy Pelosi's office. Congresswoman Pelosi is from the San Francisco district and her staff person, Judith Lemons, got right to work

on arranging a briefing for the women members of Congress.

Over the next few weeks I worked closely with Nancy Gregoire, another staff person from the Pelosi office, and we developed an agenda for a “Farm Women's Briefing.”

On a cold, rainy and miserable Tuesday, March 21, 2000 from 9:00 to 10:30 in room 2456 of the Rayburn House Office Building, women and men gathered to discuss women in farming. The room was packed with approximately 75 people; some had to sit on the floor for lack of chairs. Congresswomen present were Nancy Pelosi, D-California, Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, Undersecretary Jill Long-Thompson and staff of various Congressional representatives. Women speaking were Representative Mary Ellen Otremba, a dairy farmer from northern Minnesota, Stacey Brown, WFAN intern, Georgia Good from South Carolina, and me.

The briefing centered on the need of the United States for a comprehensive rural policy that includes farming, rural communities and rural people. Many agreed that only having a farm policy leaves out a great deal of what rural America is all about.

This historical event brought the men out to listen. It was a wonderful experience to work with Congressional staff people who were responsive and respectful. I hope that Women, Food and Agriculture Network will be able to work with the women of Congress to create policy that shapes rural America.

**Women, Food  
& Agriculture  
Network**

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

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