

Women, Food & Agriculture Network

Beautiful Flowers and Worker Exploitation: Long Hours, Chemicals, and Low Wages



Fairness in Flowers is the project of the International Labor Rights Fund.

Mission

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

,by Julia Olmstead

Just outside the Andean city of Bogotá, Colombia, rows of plastic-covered greenhouses stretch for miles. Here, in what's known as the Bogotá savannah, a mix of mild temperatures, brilliant sunshine, ample water and cheap labor produce one of every two flowers sold in the U.S.

Giant roses, flawless carnations, and colorful alstroemeria are just some of 50 flower varieties shipped daily to the U.S. from Colombia. Over the past two decades, flower plantations in Colombia have ballooned into a \$510 million dollar per year industry, making Colombia second only to Holland in flower exports. But these perfect flowers hide a disturbing story of worker exploitation and environmental degradation.

In Colombia, nearly 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Women are the majority of the impoverished population, and the growth of the flower industry has provided employment for many women desperate for work. Preferred over men for delicate flower work because of their more slen-

der and agile hands, women make up over 70 percent of the country's 80,000 flower workers.

Just north of Bogotá, in the small town of Madrid, are the greenhouses of Wesmax E.U., a flower grower that fired 250 of its 1500 employees last year when they refused to sign contracts that ensured horrific working conditions.

Workers at Wesmax tell of 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. workdays, often seven days a week, before holidays like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. The management provides mixtures of cola and coffee so they can work faster and longer shifts. Women with children are told, "you have to choose between work and your kids," as no concessions are made for childcare, children's illness, or pregnancy. Unfortunately, these conditions are not unique to Wesmax, one of 500 flower producers in Colombia.

Most disturbing among the conditions at Wesmax and other greenhouses in Colombia is worker exposure to pesticides. Workers frequently are made to

(Flowers, continued on page 3)



Calendar

September 20, 2003: Biological Composting Demonstration for Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Farmers. 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The Dairy Center, located just south of Northeast Iowa Community College at Calmar, Iowa. Guest Speakers: Dr. Tom Richard and Dr. Kathleen Delate from ISU. The demonstration will provide hands-on activities with developing quality compost and testing. Contact Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, USDA-NRCS, Tel: 319-668-8110 or email: tanya.meyer@ia.usda.gov

September-October, 2003: Field Days sponsored by the Practical Farmers of Iowa:

Sept. 19, 9am-4 pm: Francis & Susan Thicke, Radiance Dairy, 1745 Brookville Rd, FairField, 641-472-8558.

Sept. 23, 12:30-6:30 pm: Stephen Reinart, 29791 130th St, Glidden, 712-656-2563.

Sept. 28, 1:30-4:30 pm: Henry A. Wallace Country Life Center, 2773 290th St, Orient, 641-337-5019.

Oct. 4, 9 am-4 pm: Full Circle Farm, Don Adams & Nan Bonfils, 1579 P Ave, Madrid, 515-795-3288.

October 1-4, 2003: Sustainable Resources 2003, an International Forum Connecting People with Practical Sustainable Solutions to World Poverty, at the University of Colorado at Boulder. (see story at right).

October 21, 2003: Hope From the Heartland, a workshop with Ernesto Sirolli, St. Patricks Parish Center, Audubon, IA. Call 515-270-2634.

October 24, 2003: Being a Neighbor: Heart in the Heartland. Tri-State ecumenical meeting seeks solutions in neighboring Sinsinawa, WI. Call 608-748-4411, ext 805.

November 7-9, 2003: The Fourth Annual Tri-state Gathering at Good Earth Village, Spring Valley, Minnesota

January 16 -17, 2004: Iowa Network for Agriculture (INCA) Local Food Conference and Celebration. Mark your calendars now and be sure to come to INCA's new and revised annual event!

February 26-28, 2004: Fifteenth Annual Upper Midwest Organic

Farming Conference (UMOFC). La Crosse Center, on the Mississippi River in downtown La Crosse, Wisconsin (see article below, <www.mosesorganic.org> or call 715-772-3153 for more information.

Events

Sustainable Resources 2003

Sustainable Resources 2003, an International Forum Connecting People with Practical Sustainable Solutions to World Poverty, will take place October 1-4, 2003 at the Univ. of Colorado at Boulder. It is by the University of Colorado at Boulder, the Sustainable Village and the Marpa Center for Business and Economics at Naropa University.

With a current population of 6 billion, the world is becoming more crowded, more consuming, and more polluting. Today, 20% of the world's population lack clean water, 40% lack adequate sanitation, and 20% lack adequate housing. Sustainable Resources 2003 will provide unique opportunities for non-profits, donors, educators, engineers, business people, volunteers, students, and representatives of developing communities to meet, learn from each other and network.

Address inquiries to: Prof. Bernard Amadei, University of Colorado, Department of Civil Engineering, 428 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0428; tel: 303-492-7734; e-mail: <amadei@spot.colorado.edu>; website: <www.sustainableresources.org>

Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference

The Fifteenth Annual Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference (UMOFC) will be held February 26-28, 2004 in La Crosse Center, on the Mississippi River in downtown La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The UMOFC is a resource and education extravaganza! Over 45 workshops from farmers and other experts. The Organic Agriculture Trade Show showcases more than 140 businesses and organizations. Registration is \$150 for Thursday evening, all day Friday and Saturday. For further information: email: info@mosesorganic.org; tel: 715-772-3153; website: <www.mosesorganic.org>

Women, Food and Agriculture Network

This newsletter is published by the **Women, Food and Agriculture Network**, a Tides Center Project, with the help of 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. We welcome first person articles, analyses, book or video reviews, original poetry and art, and letters to editor. Deadlines for upcoming issues:

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News Briefs

Antibiotic Ban Cuts Drug Resistant Bugs

(taken from a Citizens Network listserv article, August 13, 2003)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has thrown its weight behind growing moves to ban the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in livestock.

A WHO report concludes that a voluntary ban by Danish farmers on growth promoters in chicken and pigs cut antibiotic resistance in bacteria in the animals by over 90 per cent, with little cost to farmers, and no increase in the bacterial burden of meat.

The report comes just weeks after the European Union's agriculture ministers adopted a total ban on antibiotic growth promoters in animals from 2006.

Bills to ban the use of antibiotics in feed have been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

The WHO report, "Impacts of antimicrobial growth promoter termination in Denmark" is available in pdf format at www.who.int/salmsurv/en/.

Afghanistan Agricultural Projects at Risk

(edited from a news release from the FAO, email: erwin.northoff@fao.org.)

29 May 2003, Rome/Kabul — Long-term agricultural development activities in Afghanistan are under threat unless urgently needed donor funds are provided, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N.) has warned.

"We are facing a potential funding gap of around \$25 million," said Manfred Staab, FAO Program Manager for Afghanistan.

"We are now seriously concerned about the lack of new funding commitments for long-term agricultural development projects."...

"Our main objective is that the Afghans should finally run their own institutions and play the leading role in restructuring agriculture.... We are also providing them with training on the job."

Beautiful Flowers

(continued from page 1)

enter greenhouses immediately after pesticide sprayings, without any type of protective gear. This common practice exposes workers to some of the 134 pesticides approved for use in Colombia. Seven of these pesticides are considered "extremely toxic" by the Colombian government, and 12 of them have been named by the EPA as possible carcinogens.

Two chemicals used, Aldicarb and Metomil, are N-methyl carbonates that are suspected endocrine-system disrupters. According to the Pesticide Action Network's Database, exposure to these chemicals "can cause sterility or decreased fertility, impaired development, birth defects of the reproductive tract and metabolic disorders." A 1990 study by the Colombian National Institute of Health of pregnant flower-industry workers found a higher than average rate of miscarriages, premature births, and congenital malformations among babies.

The effects of the flower industry's heavy chemical pesticide use (independent researchers estimate that Colombian flower growers use between 450-750 lbs. of active pesticide ingredients per hectare annually) aren't contained to the greenhouses. A study done in 1995 by the National University in Bogotá found traces of DDT in 22 of 25 water samples taken in the savannah. Dead, poisoned birds are regularly found near greenhouses. "The birds don't sing anymore," joked one Wesmax worker, "they cough."

Flower workers in Colombia have little leverage to improve their conditions. Complaints about working conditions and low wages and attempts to organize have resulted mostly in lay-offs and dismissals like those that happened last year at the Wesmax, E.U. facility. In a population so desperate for work, employers can easily find replacements to work for pittance wages in terrible conditions.

Multinational groups headquartered outside of Colombia own most of the floriculture companies. Dole Food, a California-based company, controls 25 percent of the flower industry here and

employs over 10,000 workers. Although Dole claims participation in an environmental standards program, there is no third party monitoring system to ensure compliance with environmental standards.

Companies here benefit from the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA), which allows flower producers tariff-free exports to the U.S. Despite that the trade preferences are by law conditioned on improvements in worker rights, the ATPA has been renewed even as workers' rights continue to be violated. These policies entice multinational companies to operate here, where they are not beholden to labor or environmental regulations as they would be in the U.S. or Europe.

With the U.S. and Colombia negotiating a bilateral free-trade agreement and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) moving rapidly through Congress to open up all of the Americas to free trade by the year 2005, defenders of workers in Colombia's flower industry worry about the effects of increasing free trade. The International Labor Rights Fund, a Washington-based non-governmental organization who have a campaign called "Fairness in Flowers", say they are concerned that "increasing free market access without effective enforcement of labor rights will further remove cut flower producers' incentives to improve working conditions."

As so many women and their families are dependent on the small wages they earn in the flower industry, flower-industry organizers in Colombia don't advise a boycott at this time. They do, however, hope that people will hear their stories and put pressure on multinational companies operating in Colombia to change the way they treat workers and the environment.

For more information visit the International Labor Rights Fund on the Web at www.laborrights.org.

(Julia Olmstead is a Bogota, Colombia-based journalist.)

NAFTA and FTAA Agreements: Bad for Farmers

by Cassi Johnson

“I have nothing. I am here out of desperation because I am poorer than I have ever been.”

These are the words of Francisco Martmnez, a Mexican peasant farmer who marched to Mexico City in December of 2002 to protest the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA’s proponents promised citizens of America, Canada, and Mexico more jobs and a better standard of living. NAFTA has failed to deliver on these promises. Since NAFTA was implemented in 1994, American workers have lost 765,000 jobs, the number of small farms in both the U.S. and Mexico has plummeted, and pollution has increased in the manufacturing corridor along the U.S.-Mexico border resulting in health problems and birth defects.

Currently, trade ministers from 23 countries are negotiating an extension of NAFTA’s disastrous trade policies to

What is the FTAA?

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is the formal name given to an expansion of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) that would include all of the countries in the western hemisphere. This massive NAFTA expansion is currently being negotiated in secret by trade ministers from 34 nations in North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. The goal of the FTAA is to impose the failed NAFTA model of increased privatization and deregulation hemisphere-wide. Imposition of these rules would empower corporations to constrain governments from setting standards for public health and safety, to safeguard their workers and to ensure that corporations do not pollute the communities in which they operate. Effectively, these rules would handcuff governments’ public interest policy-making and enhance corporate control at the expense of citizens throughout the Americas.

(Public Citizen Fact Sheet 1/14/03)

most of the western hemisphere. This agreement, called the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), is being negotiated with little citizen input. NAFTA’s failure to deliver on its promises of a better living for common people has led many citizens’ groups throughout the western Hemisphere to ask, “Who stands to benefit from the FTAA?”

The Winners with FTAA

“Corporations” is the likely answer to this question. Since NAFTA was implemented, agribusiness corporations have enjoyed rapid growth and manufacturing companies have increased profit by moving production (and therefore jobs) to areas with the lowest wages and environmental standards. Many environmental and consumer organizations believe that the U.S. is trying to use the FTAA to push genetically modified crops and seeds even though many nations and individuals are concerned about the effects of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on consumer health, the environment, and incomes of small farmers.

Under NAFTA’s Chapter 11 provision, states or nations that do try to provide regulations to protect their citizens’ health and safety through the regulation of GMOs can be sued by corporations for damages. This provision which is expected to be included in the FTAA agreement takes power away from governments and places it in the hands of corporations.

Privatization of Services

Another way that corporations stand to benefit from the FTAA—and common people stand to lose—is through the privatization of services. It is expected that the FTAA will include a “trade in services” provision, which would force member nations to privatize services such as education, healthcare, energy, and water. Privatization shifts the responsibility for these vital public needs from elected officials who are responsible to the people to corporate executives who are responsible to the bottom line.

A growing movement of people throughout the western hemisphere are joining together to demand that their governments keep control over citizens’

health, safety, and livelihood. Individual citizens, labor unions, farmers’ organizations, environmental groups, social justice advocates, and other citizens’ groups are saying “NO” to the FTAA. You can learn more about the movement at www.stopftaa.org or www.globalexchange.org.

(Cassi Johnson is currently enrolled in the graduate program for sustainable agriculture at Iowa State University.)

Civil Society Goes to FTAA Ministerial

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Ministerial will take place in Miami, Florida from November 19-21, 2003. As trade ministers and their corporate allies discuss expansion of the NAFTA model to the entire hemisphere, tens of thousands of activists from social movements and organizations will gather to express opposition to the FTAA and to share information and exchange stories about the real impacts of corporate globalization on workers, family farmers, women, indigenous people, human rights, democracy and the environment.

Plans are underway for marches and rallies; a People’s Gala with music, speakers and the presentation of ballots against the FTAA from throughout the hemisphere; a conference on the impacts of globalization in the African world; a workers rights forum; and numerous other events.

Workshops, panels and teach-ins organized under various themes. Groups are encouraged to get engaged in all levels of planning and organizing around these themes. The main, overarching title for the series of days is “Alternatives to Corporate Globalization—Voices from the Americas”.

WFAN will be participating with the International Gender and Trade Network to discuss how free trade impacts women’s lives.

Websites on Trade Issues

Global Exchange: <www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/ftaa/topten.html>

Public Citizen: <www.citizen.org/documents/FTAA%20Factsheet%20Jan.%202003.pdf>

Mexico Solidarity Network: <www.mexicosolidarity.org/ftaa_miami_call_to_action.html>

People's Consultation on the FTAA: <www.peoplesconsultation.org/>

Alliance for Responsible Trade: <www.art-us.org/>

United for a Fair Economy: <www.ufenet.org/econ/workshops/ftaa_for_begginner.html>

The Gender and Trade Network: <www.genderandtrade.net/>

What You Can Do: Buy Fair Trade Goods

by Susan Singh

The fair trade movement is growing rapidly. The Fair Trade Federation estimates that \$500 million has been spent by fair trade consumers. Fair Trade Certified goods (trademark of TransFair USA) guarantee that the producer, farmer, or crafts person receive a fair, living wage for his/her work, work in healthy and sustainable conditions, and receive the support they need to improve their communities and develop their businesses. Often they belong to cooperatives, are educated in environmentally friendly practices, and protected from sweatshops and child labor.

Some of the most available free trade items are coffee, tea and cocoa. Coffee farmers are in crisis the world over due to the falling world market price for coffee. Small farmers receive pennies a pound for the coffee they grow under normal market conditions, but fair trade buyers give them \$1.26/pound, enough to support their families in a healthy way. Some large retailers such as Safeway, Starbucks, Whole Foods, and Wild Oats now carry Free Trade Coffee. Co-op America is currently conducting a campaign to ask Albertsons and Safeway to

(Continued to the right)

Beyond the Traditional Family Farm

For many people, the word "farmer" conjures up the idea of a white male with a wife and children. Midwestern values centered around the traditional family remain strong in rural areas and are accentuated even further in the agricultural community. But there is more to our farming community than meets the eye.

Sometimes hidden, yet in our midst, are "non-traditional" farmers, such as gays and lesbians.

Lesbian farmers face economic challenges as women, and social, political and cultural challenges as lesbians. Many lesbians, living far from metro areas where they are more free to express themselves, remain invisible, a feeling expressed recently in an article by a Des Moines-based lesbian group, the Women's Cultural Collective.

WFAN members have long discussed the importance of tapping into the lesbian farming population as a part of our mission of "linking and amplifying women's voices." Our membership includes lesbians, including farmers working in agricultural enterprises—some independently and some in partnership with another woman.

How might WFAN help give voice to women otherwise hidden or ignored, whether out of ignorance, suspicion, resentment, or even hatred? One way we hope to address these complex issues is through our Lesbian Farmers Outreach Project, recently launched with financial

support from the Astraea Foundation. The intent of this project is to connect to lesbian farmers and provide outlets through which they might express themselves or market their products.

We seek to identify 10 to 15 women to participate in this project. We encourage anyone reading this article who might be interested to contact us. The research protocol, developed under the guidance of Sine Anahita (Ph.D., Sociology, Iowa State University) assures participants the utmost level of confidentiality should they wish to remain anonymous. We also welcome the participation of those who wish to openly express who they are.

WFAN project staff will be conducting personal interviews during farm visits or over the phone this fall. Some of the information we gather, with the permission of project participants, will be shared in a journal at WFAN events, on WFAN's webpage, or in our newsletter. Information may also assist in the marketing of farm products, traditional or not so traditional or services (musics, arts, crafts), whether via our web site or through brochures distributed at venues such as the Tri-State Gathering.

For further information on this project, please contact Denise O'Brien via e-mail (CoWfan@metc.net), phone (712-243-3264), or by mail at WFAN, 59624 Chicago Road, Atlantic, IA, 50022-9619.

pressure Proctor and Gamble to carry Free Trade Certified coffee in their lines. This would greatly increase the amount of free trade coffee available. So the next time you are in one of these stores tell them to ask Proctor and Gamble to carry a Free Trade Certified line.

Tea, cocoa, handicrafts, clothing, furniture and rugs can be found under Free Trade Certified labels. Look for labels that say Fair Trade Certified, Fair Trade Federation, Rainforest Alliance Certified, or Rugmark, for carpets. On the Internet, visit www.greenpages.org, www.transfairusa.org, for general information about where to shop, or specific businesses

such as <tenthousandvillages.com> <www.globalcrafts.org>.

Until fair trading becomes more common, finding the products can be challenging unless you live in a big city, or can buy on the Internet. One way to deal with this scarcity is to ask your retailers to carry free trade certified products, and if need be educate them on what that means and how to contact wholesalers. And if you have money to invest, consider investing in a fair trade business.

A Fragile Wild: Reflections on WFAN's Summer Meeting

by Nancy Dundatscheck

As I approached the back porch of the old farm house at Amy Miller and Mike Natvig's home, I felt the child inside of me. I was delighted to see kittens nursing from their mama. Even the presence of the sorry-looking older cat gave me comfort, because she reminded me that she spent a good part of her life nursing and nurturing.

Then came the business of Women, Food and Agriculture's Coordinating Council meeting. Here collectively was a group of women earnestly organizing to formalize WFAN's structure and working to the bone and muscle to make this small organization run as efficiently as possible. In the midst of all this seriousness, one of the kittens quietly proceeded to "decorate" the dining room rug. Stacey Brown had coincidentally placed her purse down on the "anointed" spot, lifted it up, and placed it on her lap. Thus, Stacey "decorated" her own skirt! Perhaps the kitten was there to remind us of our own humble beginnings, and to help us remember that in much of the work we do, there is always the "sh_t" to clean up!

All of this domesticated wonder was followed by a delicious home-made potluck dinner, jazzed up by locally raised grilled burgers and franks. The unusual variety of food was accompanied by a fantastic lineup of desserts, which surely tickled the little girl in all present.

Goat and Dairy Farm

That evening, we took a short drive to a goat farm and dairy facility just a short distance from the Miller/Natvig home. Again, I delighted in the large-eyed, friendly variety of goats, which came in the shapes and colors indicative of Alpine, Nubian and other species. Not only did each of us get to pet the goats while they were feeding, we also got to sample the wonderful cheeses provided by our hosts. If ever there was an example of a family couple with hearts of gold living their dreams, this couple was it.

And when I tired of goats and cats (they were everywhere!), I could always stop to pet the affectionate and patient sheepdog, watch the embrace of the sur-

rounding trees, and take in the sunset stretching over the farmland in the distance.

The next morning following breakfast, our group visited a prairie reconstructed under the watchful "mama's eyes" of Laura Jackson. Laura's talk was excellent, but also allowed my thoughts and eyes to wander and wonder on the gifts of summer-burr oaks filtering afternoon sunlight, bumble bees and butterflies visiting softly colored flora, undulations of grass and soil, and visits with common herbs such as plantain and self-heal.

Laura also brought us to a fen — wonderfully refreshing and smelling reminiscent of an ancient, long forgotten time and place.

All of this reminded me of how delicate and endangered life is—whether it comes in the form of conventional seed, or from the very center of woman or beast. Isn't this why we are involved in the work that we do?

How important it is to nourish and protect that sacred wild in its earliest stages of growth. We as women, often in the role of nurturers, must remember to sharpen our claws in preparation for political and economic onslaught coming in from the outside world. And it is getting harder, isn't it? But that doesn't mean it is time to give up. It is time to dig deeper.

Each time that I tap into the wild part of me, the wildness around me—even the domesticated wild found in cats and on farms—it feeds me, and it reminds me to symbolically pick up the warrior's shield and sword if necessary. To learn how to retain our nurturing qualities, while drawing upon the snakelike savvy indicative of the Goddess—perhaps that is our challenge we as women face during these often difficult and exciting times.

I invite you to join us in remembering the wild, while nurturing the child inside of you, at the next WFAN meeting, which will be held this November in Spring Valley, MN. The theme of the meeting is Healing the Soil, Healing the Soul. See you this Fall!

This writing and my life in general have been partially inspired by *Women*

Who Run with the Wolves, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *For-Giving*, by Genevieve Vaughn, and *The Secret of Roan Innish*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *Whale Rider*, and *Where the River Runs Black* (all movies).

Reintroducing Prairie

by Danielle Wirth

Amy Miller and Mike Natvig are experimenting with warm season grazing options for their organically raised cattle, a fine looking, contented herd of Angus.

The pasture renovation involved reintroduction of several native forb (wildflower) and grass species. In times past, most of Iowa's 35 million acres had flourishing tallgrass prairie with up to 300 different species in one location. As a prairie healer and reconstructionist, I thrive on the inherent diversity of ecosystems. Many of us who do this work are trying to woo back the original tallgrass prairie by removing alien invasive species, removing overgrown native species that thrive in former prairies because of current fire suppression activities, reintroducing prairie plants that represent the native diversity, and finally, restoring the landscape scale features like fire and hydrology. (That's a quick and dirty recipe for prairie restoration.)

In much of the Midwest, the bulk of the landscape is privately owned. It is essential for the private landowner to be able to engage in an agriculture that is economically viable while remaining sustainable in terms of soil, wildlife and local plant communities. Some prairie purists might be troubled by the reintroduction of only four prairie species to the Miller/Natvig farm. Considering the outcome of a grazing system that approximates the movement of buffalo through the landscape (accomplished by a series of fenced pastures and moving cattle frequently so the grass community recovers), the prairie reconstruction becomes a valuable sustainable practice.

Dr. Laura Jackson, associate professor of biology at the University of Northern Iowa, worked with Amy and Mike suggesting mixtures of local ecotype seed such as Big Bluestem, Compass plant

(very high in protein!), Indiangrass and Illinois Bundleflower.

Different treatments were applied to several locations. In some places, the non-native cool season grasses and forbes were treated with Roundup and prairie species were planted after about two weeks. In other plots, prairie seeds were sown directly into existing non-native, cool-season pastures. What is most striking is the overall results. In many cases, the persistent, non-native, cool-season plants would not leave. BUT... prairie species emerged and grew within that complex. As the cool season plants go dormant with hot dry weather, the prairie plants come on strong. This results in extended grazing seasons for farmers who are willing to invest time in re-establishing native species. The cattle especially love compass plant, and we did not see a compass plant over 24" in height since they were munched with enthusiasm.

Wildfarm Alliance is engaging in research and support for farmers who are choosing to grow food for people in sustainable ways that fit within the context of the landscape. Wild Farm Alliance fits well with the project of the Wild Lands project - a group of dedicated conservation biologists who have as their goal the rewilding of North America.

Contact information: Jo Ann Baumgarner, Wild Farm Alliance, 406 Main Street, Suite 213, Watsonville, CA 95076; tel: 831-761-8408; website: <www.wildfarmalliance.org>; email: <wildfarms@earthlink.net>.

Coordinator's Corner

by Denise O'Brien, Coordinator for WFAN

As I write there is an historic blackout on the East Coast. Watching reports on television and hearing them on the radio, I feel very glad that I live in the south-west corner of Iowa! It makes me realize just how vulnerable Americans are to systems that can shut down so quickly.

Just because I live in Iowa doesn't mean that I am isolated from such disasters. Ten years ago we milked cows for 3 days when an ice storm took out our electricity. When something like this happens, I don't feel so utterly vulnerable. I have food in the garden. I live in the country where breezes provide the coolness and I can be relatively self-sufficient for the short run. Don't get me wrong. I am not gloating. I am just thankful that my life is less complicated than others in more urban settings.

This does bring me to thinking about how I can be more self-sufficient. My husband and I have talked for years about setting up a wind generator. We have also considered some solar water heating systems. Now is the time to take action on those dreams. There is an energy bill in the U.S. Congress right now and if enough people pressure their Congresspersons, perhaps there will be opportunities for ordinary people to invest in alternative energy.

I recently read that cities in the United States have a food reserve of one week. That seems like a rather short period of

time. Communities investing in local food systems would be able to extend that one week to three or four or perhaps six. What if our major highways were shut down? What if the supply of fossil fuels diminishes to nothing? How would people feed themselves?

An article in this issue about women working in the floral industry reveals that instead of raising food, these women work in an export industry that is literally killing them. The current negotiations in the trade arena continue to create a more vulnerable world. When we specialize in certain crops, creating monocultures, we make ourselves vulnerable to pests, diseases and ultimately a lack of food to feed ourselves. The article about the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas exposes the unfairness of the current trade system.

Finally, the planning committee for the Women's Winter Gathering is busy making preparations for November 7th, 8th and 9th. We will be returning to Good Earth Village in Spring Valley, Minnesota. Their new lodge should make us all feel comfy. The registration will be \$85-that includes two nights lodging and four local food-meals—WOW, what a deal!

At this writing our troops are still in Iraq and we keep losing soldiers almost daily. We need to bring them home!

Peace, Denise

Healing the Soil, Healing the Soul

Join the Women, Food & Agriculture Network, the Wisconsin Women's Sustainable Farming Network, and Women in Sustainable Agriculture, Minnesota at the Fourth Annual Fall Harvest Women's Gathering Nov. 7-9, 2003, at Good Earth Village near Spring Valley, Minnesota. This event brings women involved in sustainable agriculture together from the tri-state area to learn, network, and eat great food. A new lodge with improved sleeping facilities will highlight our return to this site of our first two gatherings.

This year's theme, Healing the Soil, Healing the Soul, will explore the relationship we have with healing—work is healing and we heal through our work. Through workshops, music, and building relationships, we will create a healing and educational weekend to gain knowledge and skills about agriculture. Some of this year's workshops will include Living off the Powergrid, Herbal Remedies for Animals, and virtual farm tours with women's stories about how their work is both healing and not.

Look for registration forms in the mail in September. Registration will be \$85 if received by Monday, October 27, 2003 and \$95 for late registration. This includes food, lodging, and all programs for the weekend. Scholarships are available. This gathering is a powerful place for women to come together and exchange their concerns and stories. We hope you can join us! Email Stacey Brown at staceyleighbrown@yahoo.com for questions and information.

**Women, Food
& Agriculture
Network**

A Tides Center Project
59624 Chicago Road
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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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Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Membership is either \$30 or \$10 (your choice). Fill out this form and make your check payable to Tides-WFAN. This newsletter is a benefit of membership. We are a network of women with food, agricultural, environmental and economic concerns. Please share your thoughts, ideas, successes, interests, and solutions with us.

Enclosed is \$30 for my yearly membership.

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Name _____

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Email (print clearly): _____

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