

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

Linking and empowering women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just, sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2007

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Women Food and Agriculture Network is an active, hardworking, dedicated group--most of the time we each work hard in our own ways to make a new vision of food and farming a reality. It is soul-satisfying work, but it can take a lot out of a person. Finding ways to renew, rejuvenate, and re-inspire ourselves and each other is essential. This time of year, as the winter light and fallow soil seem to point us inward to a more reflective mode, we decided to highlight some of the creative ways that women in our network have found to renew themselves, and at the same time, become more connected to each other and to a larger vision.

Enjoy our cover story and the report on our Fall Gathering and be inspired by women's work in Michigan and the story of Denise's groundbreaking campaign. Then get ready to gear up for another active year of farming, farm policy, and changing the food system!

WFAN on Mallard Island

By Mary Swalla Holmes

In August eight hardy women found a way to leave their regular duties behind and spend a week together on Mallard Island. This tiny island, part of a small archipelago in Rainy Lake just south of the Canadian border, is cared for by the Oberholtzer Foundation. Mary Doerr, Bonnie and Inga Haugen, Mary Jo Majerus, Valerie Dantoin-Adamski and Beth

Waterhouse joined caretaker Mary Swalla Holmes, her daughter Lyn and grand-daughter Ella for a "wild" retreat week.

Our arrival was dramatic! We were greeted by a mature bald eagle as the boat neared Half-Mile island. We slowed down to admire the sight and noticed a commotion in the water. A second adult eagle was flapping in the water, about twenty feet from the shore. At first we thought the eagle was injured, but as we came closer we could see a look of determination and purpose in her movements. Everyone knows that eagles don't swim, yet there she was, swimming to shore! By this time, we had the binoculars and we could see the large fish she held in her talons. As she approached the shore she took a couple of small hops and landed her 18 inch pike! We decided this was the female, just doing what she had to do to feed her family. The male and a juvenile soon joined her for their "shore lunch".

It was a great beginning to an amazing week. Mary D., Mary Jo and Valerie, inspired by the eagle, provided us with several meals from the lake. (See poem by Mary Jo.) Grass-fed beef, cheeses and other delicious foods appeared from farms and local providers and were shared each day in early afternoon meals. Each day, the group pondered a guiding question, and then gathered in the Drum Room in the evening to discuss it. This often led to impromptu singing, laughing and spontaneous ritual. (Continued on Page 3)



Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

This newsletter is published by the **Women, Food, and Agriculture Network**, a Tides Center Project. 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 the editor. Deadlines for upcoming issues:

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Save the date: WFAN Annual Meeting

Join WFAN staff and Executive Board members for a luncheon meeting on March 31st. Learn more about WFAN's accomplishments in the past year and plans for 2007. The meeting will be March 31st in Des Moines. Stay tuned for location and registration information.

Support WFAN in the New Year

WFAN has had an incredible journey through the last ten years. As we journey into the future it is important that we have your support. Please consider contributing in 2007 to help us build WFAN. An envelope is included in this issue to fill out and return.

"Food and Farming For the Future": INCA's 12th Annual Local Food Conference

Help us kick-off the 12th Annual Local Foods Conference with a morning filled with learning and sharing with one another. Brother David Andrews will lead us in an interactive session to inform our local, state and federal officials about the challenges and opportunities of developing a local food system in Iowa.

Who will you get to talk with? INCA has invited Senator Tom Harkin, who will chair the United States Senate Agriculture Committee beginning in January 2007. Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey will be attending, as will key legislators from around the state, locally elected officials, health professionals, educators and members of the faith community. Please join the conversation!

The conference will be held February 3rd at Marshalltown Community College in Marshalltown, Iowa. For more information visit www.growinca.org.

Calendar

January 12-13, 2007

Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference
Des Moines, Iowa

See www.practicalfarmers.org for more details.

January 25-28, 2007

Southern SAWG Conference
Louisville, Kentucky

See www.ssawg.org for more details.

January 26-27, 2007

Midwest Value Added Conference
Red Wing, Minnesota

See www.rivercountryrcd.org for more details.

February 3RD, 2007

INCA 12th Annual Local Food Conference
Marshalltown, Iowa

See article on this page for more details.

February 22-24th, 2007

Upper Midwest Organic Conference
LaCrosse, Wisconsin

www.mosesorganic.org



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(Continued from Page 1) "I have a lovely memory of all of us walking towards Japanese House at sunset one evening... slowly and mindfully as we beat various drums and other percussive instruments. Then we stood together on the point watching the sun go down, our rhythmic drumming soothing and grounding us as we became attuned to one another... playfully, lovingly, One Heartbeat. I recall that image whenever I feel alone or sad and remember I am part of something so much bigger than myself. Mallard Island does that to a person" writes Mary Doerr.

Beth Waterhouse shares this from her journal: The lapping at the kitchen dock and over on Crow Island come in at two slightly different beats.

Two gulls soar and twist— do they eat bugs in flight? Inga (24) and Ella (3) play on into our long evening. Both giggle and wear dresses. The 'older' women talk and clean while I try pen on paper. A small yellow butterfly flits around the sunlit corner of Cedar Bark house.

Today's guiding question was about our own "veins of gold," and I'm wondering what mine is at home.

"Making something whole as in fixing a hole in a sweater or editing a document.

Being a part of someone's awakening— being present when they reach that 'aha' moment with my help or maybe just with my witnessing.

When time is my own and I can 'float' among the signals or urges of an hour, a day... All these make me think of a vein of gold."

Inga and Bonnie Haugen shared the big comfortable house on the east end of the Island. Inga says "At Mallard Island, I felt as though I was suspended in the best hammock in the world. The stars above, the water below, the comfort of earth and the best fresh air ever. It is the best hammock ever, also, because of the shared food, wisdom and BOOKS! Enough elbow room, but the best things in life are shared."

Bonnie Haugen summed up the week this way: "AWESOME. Deeply wonderful, refreshing island, water, atmosphere, spirit, and intriguing souls- visible and not. I can't imagine a better vacation that is affordable, relaxing, refreshing, and truly meaningful."

Next year's retreat week on Mallard Island is August 5-11, 2007. For more information contact Mary Swalla Holmes or Mary Doerr.

The women of Mallard Island, clockwise from left: Bonnie, Mary Jo, Valerie, Beth, Mary, Inga. Photo taken by Mary Swalla Holmes.

Sunrise Paddle

By Mary Jo Majerus

Cool morning - misty, quiet as a morning dove
 Silent footfalls on the rock
 Creeeeak ...the Wanigan door
 Boiling water, creamy hot coffee
 Paddles, life jackets, fishing pole and lure gathered
 Gentle bumps echo as the canoe is slipped softly into the water

Soft voices - quiet, for sound is carried on morning breezes
 And others cuddle under puffy comforters, still snoozing
 Dip the paddle in, ease ever so slowly away from the dock.
 Move smoothly between Hawk and Mallard, up the channel
 Glide past Japanese Tea House

Three hours pass
 Conversation no longer muted, lake awakened
 Sharing stories, thoughts, musings, feelings
 Time has peacefully passed, sun warming our backs
 Beaver swims an arm's length away, old turtle pops up to greet

On to Virgin Mary Island
 Hot now, we slide off rocks like seals to cool ourselves in icy water
 Then basking, skin against rough volcanic stone
 Canoeing once again, around the island
 Ah! - a Pileated woodpecker!
 Dip paddle silently, nudge closer, then closer...
 Five feet away - astonishment, joy, marveling in the miracle.
 Hushed admiration for nature's magnificence

Clouds darken sunshine, storm over Jackfish Island
 Racing the rain.
 Pulling together now, flying.
 Stroke, stroke, stroke
 One, two three, switch.
 Unity in unison, we beat the rain



Fall Harvest Gathering Builds Spirit of Community

By JoAnn Pipkorn

This year nearly-26 women gathered at the Cedar Valley Resort in Minnesota. The theme of the weekend was Finding Home and Creating Community. For just under \$100.00, each participant received two nights lodging, workshops, all the food anyone could possibly eat (plus taking leftovers home), peace and quiet if you wanted it, and a bonding experience with other women that was life changing. The Women's Gathering is always the second full weekend in November. I had missed the last couple of gatherings. But I had a nagging pang since my WFAN newsletter arrived in August. I kept feeling the tug on my heart strings and I'm glad I listened to it. We had together time and introspective, alone time.

It is a weekend I look forward to and anticipate with giddiness. I share with kindred spirits the joys and pains of farming. We share open, honest, heartfelt

“I share with kindred spirits the joys and pains of farming. We share open, honest, heartfelt realities.”

realities. I open up and am authentic with my tri-state gathering friends in a way that I can open up to no one else in the world. We cry, laugh, learn and love. I'd personally like to thank Mary, Bonnie and Caroline for continuing the tradition

of gathering this year without our usual committee captain Stacey. The committee did a fantastic job. Thank you, as well, to the represented organizations of WISA-MN and WFAN for continuing to see the benefit of a gathering like this. The annual silent auction is still a way to help offset the costs of the weekend and provide scholarships for attendance. There were many fine items to encourage some friendly competition!

This year three daughters joined the ranks. The regions were well represented in the daughter category. Inga from Minnesota, Emily from Wisconsin and Juniper from Iowa. When asked what she thought her mother did at these weekends, the teenager of the bunch answered truthfully and without reservation that she thought her mom went on these weekends and danced naked in the moonlight around the campfire. Well, it did not take long for that to be a running joke of the weekend.

Caroline van Schaik was the virtual farm tour showcase this year. We thank her for letting us in to her special world along the Mississippi River in Minnesota. Beth Waterhouse taught us about shempa shields and expressed the importance of always looking at what is behind the anger or conflict. We explored ways of offsetting 'hooks' and regaining inner and outer peace. Before the workshop, the presenter and some members of the planning committee presented a skit on how easy these emotional hooks can be set into motion. It was a very effective tool to set us up for the workshop. We were howling with laughter. Mary Swalla Holmes, Executive Director of the Oberholtzer Foundation and Mallard Island's Program

Director led a workshop on creating peace. Many women walked away with tools and phrases to use in finding inner peace in order to create outer peace. Mary Doerr provided a session on tree pruning and Inga Haugen demonstrated

how we can get hooked on the computer to talk with each other, in a different way than email. Mary Kay Sharp Piltingsrud led a creative movement session on Saturday night. Each woman worked alone, with a partner, and then as a large group. It was also an exercise in trust and an expression of friendship. Since my body is wracked with arthritis and NOT flexible, I truly appreciated the subtle movements that might help me gain range of motion. Thank you to all the presenters for putting so much time and effort into your presentations. They were enjoyed by all.

We built the spirit of community all weekend. One of the intentional ways we were community builders was to enjoy a potluck on Saturday. A 10 foot table was overflowing with colorful dishes containing food cooked with heart and soul. Saturday supper was also filled with chili and soups and a variety of bread. I truly encourage all women interested in Sustainable Agriculture to think about attending next year's weekend in Strawberry Point Iowa. We have the Stone Center at Camp EWALU reserved. <http://www.ewalu.org/stonectr.htm> It is not the same building we used last time we were at EWALU. Make plans now to enjoy the company of other sustainably minded woman. Give yourself that gift; you'll be so glad you did.

Facilities: The Stone Center can accommodate groups of up to 50 people. There are 16 cozy and private bedrooms in the lodge. Each motel style bedroom includes twin beds with private bathrooms and showers. The retreat center also has a large meeting room and a separate lounge to provide a relaxed atmosphere that offers guests quiet, comfort, and easy accessibility

Prison Garden Grows Food and Hope

Ellen Baron is the Horticulture Instructor at Huron Valley Complex-Women's Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Here she writes about the impact of the prison garden on the lives of her horticulture students.

While most would think that it would be impossible for a prisoner to have a positive impact upon a community, the Horticulture program at Huron Valley Complex—Women in Ypsilanti, Michigan is doing just that. This minimum security state correctional facility houses 800 women inmates. As a means to prepare for successful re-entry into the community, the female prisoners are given the opportunity to obtain a GED and to learn vocational skills in areas such as Business Education Technology, Automotive Repair, Graphic Arts, Building Trades, or Horticulture.

Horticulture students begin by learning the basics: plant parts, plant processes, nutrition, soils, and propagation. Students get numerous opportunities to put their skills to work with hands-on experiences. Whether it is growing houseplants or maintaining a perennial

bed, students learn about the intricacies of growing plants. Students are changed by the experience. "When I watch something that I am responsible for grow, it gives me the confidence that I can be successful in life too!" says one student.

One rewarding practical experience for students is working in the vegetable garden. Each student is responsible for a one hundred square foot plot. The student is required to plan, plant, and maintain her plot throughout the growing season. Prior to starting the vegetable garden, students must research each plant's height, spacing needs, starting dates, and maintenance requirements.

" Growing vegetables for others makes me feel helpful instead of hopeless in the most unlikely of places."

In addition, students work in the community garden, a special section of the garden dedicated exclusively for donation to the local Food Gatherers Food Rescue Program in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The community garden is planned by advanced horticulture students. This part of the garden is made up of fifty beds, each fifty square feet in

size. Each bed grows a specific crop--tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, beets, carrots, onions, beans, okra, watermelon, cantaloupe, squash, pumpkins, eggplant, turnips, corn, lettuce, spinach, greens, peas, and strawberries. Over the past four years, the community and personal gardens have produced over 24,000 pounds of produce on approximately one third of an acre. The food is harvested in the morning by the horticulture class, picked up by Food Gatherers by noon and is on the plates of those that need it by dinner time. As one student has described the experience, "I may not be in the best situation at this time, but there are others out there that don't have any idea where their next meal is coming

from. Growing vegetables for others makes me feel helpful instead of hopeless in the most unlikely of places."

The benefits to the students of growing fresh produce and giving it to someone who needs it more than they do is immeasurable and life transforming. Gardening in prison gives students the ability to work without societal barriers. They gain priceless experience as actors in an ensemble task to accomplish shared goals, goals they know mean someone else in need is not going hungry that day. One student said, "It's so gratifying to know that I can really make still can make a difference in life."

"The act of putting into your mouth what the earth has grown is perhaps your most direct interaction with the earth."

-- Frances Moore Lappe



Reflections of a Hard Fought Political Race

As I bring closure to the focus of my life for the past eighteen months, my candidacy for Iowa Secretary of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, there are many images and thoughts that pass through my mind.

First and foremost, traveling the entire state and meeting so many Iowans has, by far, been one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I have always appreciated that I am an Iowan and now that appreciation is deeply embedded within my being.

Iowans are intelligent, literate and most of all, kind hearted. Everywhere I went people offered me encouragement and

praise for the work I was doing. People with very little means contributed to my campaign because they believed in me and the message I carried. This race was bigger than me, Denise O'Brien; it was about the people of Iowa and their willingness to participate in the process of creating a future with clean air, clean water and most of all, the quality of life that all Iowans seek.

I feel fortunate to have participated in running for a statewide office. Only in a state with a small population like Iowa can someone like myself enter into politics with a strong grassroots base and very little money. There was overwhelming support for me as I finished the Primary last June. Going on to garner forty nine per cent of the vote, nearly half a million people, is a heartening experience. People want change in Iowa agriculture and they are knocking at the farmgate.

There has been a dark side to this campaign as well. When character assassination is used to destroy a candidate's reputation, it takes campaigns beyond issues and qualifications. Having listened to people all over the state, I know that most Iowans dislike negative campaigning. Throughout the campaign for Secretary of Agriculture people remarked about how this race in particular kept to the issues and qualifications. In the final weeks, when it was clear that my campaign was ahead in the polls, the negativity started to surface and grew to such an intensity during the last seventy two hours before the election that it was disparaging.

I'm afraid that negative campaigns discourage people from running for office. It must be understood that human beings are not perfect. Things happen in our lives that we have no

control over, but must take responsibility for. Circumstances that, when taken out of context, can make one look horrible. This should not hold us back from participating in the political process. In our democracy we have the responsibility to vote and the opportunity to run as a political candidate. People have gone to war to protect these rights.

The experience I have gained being a candidate in this great state of Iowa will be one for my memory book. My life has changed. Giving people hope and opportunity for the future was a goal of mine when I started this journey. I feel that I have met this goal and the campaign went far beyond my expectations.

My family and I have been touched by many people. There are so many fine people in this state that I am humbled and honored to have spent so much time with so many. Iowa has a bright future with an engaged public. It is important that we, as Iowans, keep working toward a future where all residents can enjoy the quality of life that makes Iowa strong. I have no doubt in my mind that we are poised to do just that.

As to my relationship with WFAN, I will continue as Executive Director on a part time basis for the next several months as I explore how best to build on the opportunities that opened during my campaign. The Coordinating Council and I will be working together to continue to fundraise to do the work that was set out in our long range plan and a vision for WFAN.

Everywhere I go women always tell me how important it is for WFAN to exist. whatever the future holds, I will continue to work hard helping to "link and empower women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity."

Please feel free to get in touch with me any time to discuss ideas or concerns about WFAN. I always enjoy hearing from you.



Denise on the campaign trail at an Iowa Farmers' Union sponsored debate

Join in the conversation on the WFAN message board!

Ah, the glories of the Internet! Connecting people instantly to more information than they could ever use. But have you ever wanted a hand to hold to help you sift that information? A place to voice questions, rant about your latest disappointment and wax ecstatically about your latest victory? Have you ever wanted to reply to some information you feel is wrong and give more accurate information? There are many avenues answer these questions, like e-mail, telephone calls, chat rooms and even (gasp!) paper letters! Another way to connect with like-minded people is by using a message board. The WFAN message board at <http://womenfood.proboards50.com> is a message board designed to connect people and ideas. A small corner of the Internet to network, ask and answer questions, create community, find support, complain about nay-sayers and use however the members of WFAN find useful. Conversations, or threads, form in an organic manner, as people respond to the previous posting. The message board is a place to come when you want to seek it out, it won't fill up your inbox, or ring you and make you take time to answer. Come along and seek us out. We welcome newcomers, and old hands alike. Feel free to just look at the threads or post right away. The message board, and women from the Fall Gathering are waiting!

Support WFAN while you surf the Web

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network is now a part of GoodSearch.com. This is a new philanthropic web search engine run by Yahoo.

So how can you help support WFAN while you surf the web? Simply go to www.GoodSearch.com. Navigate to the middle of the screen, where there is a bar that reads "Who do you GoodSearch for?" Enter Women, Food, and Agriculture Network and then use the toolbar above to search the web. You can also download a toolbar to your computer so GoodSearch.com appears directly in your web browser.

How does it work? Search engines like Yahoo and Google generate revenue through ads that run along the side or top of the screen while you search. GoodSearch donates a part of that revenue back to the designated organization, allowing web surfers to earn approximately \$.01 for their designated organization for each search.

Although \$.01 does not seem like much money, if 1,000 WFAN supporters and their friends use GoodSearch.com twice per day they will raise \$7,350 for WFAN in one year.

Please consider making GoodSearch.com your new search engine, and as you browse the web this winter for information about farming practices, conferences, or as you place your seed order for spring, you can help support Women, Food, and Agriculture Network. Don't forget to tell your friends and family too!



Farmers Wanted for Organic Commodity Price Reporting

Certified organic growers of organic grains, beans, oilseeds and hay are invited to participate in a new organic commodity price reporting service. The service is being developed by Gigi DiGiacomo, a Senior Fellow with the University of Minnesota's School of Agriculture Endowed Chair Program, in collaboration with the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

The new price reporting service will make available high, low, and weighted average prices for organic commodities throughout the Upper Midwest. Prices will be gathered from buyers and sellers on a daily basis and reported either monthly or weekly – depending on the volume of data available. Once collected, all data will be available in a report format and through the AMS' searchable database online.

Farmers will "benefit tremendously" from organic price reporting DiGiacomo says. "Price reporting will create transparency and stability in the marketplace." And, she says, the more farmer participation the better. "Currently, there are only a handful of price reporting services for organic commodities," DiGiacomo says. "These services report prices offered by buyers only. The price reporting that I am proposing to establish with AMS will average prices from buyers and sellers so that a balance is created and price manipulation in either direction is minimized." Moreover, DiGiacomo says, by including the organic numbers in AMS' database, lenders, crop insurance agents, growers, and others in the industry will be able to access information and generate price histories for organic commodities free of charge.

For more information, please contact Gigi DiGiacomo by phone at 612-710-1188 or by email at rgdigiacomo@earthlink.net. For a copy of current AMS reports for conventional grain and livestock commodities, visit <http://marketnews.usda.gov>.

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