

News from the Robyn Van En Center

By Kathy Ruhf

CSA census forms keep trickling in! It's not too late to be a statistic; CSA farmers who were in business in 1999 may still send their forms to the Van En Center, or ask for a census form from Jayne Shord. Of 1,019 census surveys sent, nearly 400 have been returned. The data are being entered and analyzed. The survey was designed to gather information about characteristics of CSA operations: general information, operator characteristics, land and land tenure, and farm and family income.

Some examples: the average number of years in operation was 5.2. Nearly 60% of CSA farms reporting are organized as sole proprietorships, while 10% are a not-for-profit. The average number of acres operated for the CSA was 7. Interesting? Want to know more?? Stay tuned for reports prepared by the Van En Center and the CSA Research Team. The census will be held every other year, so you can be counted for 2001.

Speaking of research, the current Northeast CSA project, funded by Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NE SARE) will sponsor a CSA research project. Based on input from over 50 farmers and shareholders at the 1999 conference, the research will focus on farm economics. University of Massachusetts resource economist Dan Lass will work with Jeremy Barker-Plotkin, a former CSA farmer with a specialty in participatory, on-farm research to design and implement a one-year research study. Jeremy is soliciting input about specific topics of interest and recruiting participants in the study. For more information, and to provide input, contact Jeremy at jbp@the-spa.com.

While originally conceived as a regional center, the Van En Center performs many functions that are national in scope. It

is now managing the national CSA Farm Directory, with support from the USDA. It averages 50 phone, written and electronic inquiries per month, from all over the country. The website is visited frequently; it contains the National Directory, resources, linkages, a growing technical assistance program, and a new "happenings" section. Check it out at www.csacenter.org.

As part of its business plan to achieve sustainability, the Van En Center is working with regional CSA support organizations to generate funds so that both national and local support services can continue to strengthen CSA farms and the CSA movement. One strategy is to ask CSA shareholders to participate in supporting services such as the National Directory and technical support program, both of which are seen as vital to creating and keeping CSA farms. Center staff will emphasize outreach and promotion this year. We are looking for ways to keep these important services going, through partnerships with all organizations that work with the CSA community. Any ideas? Contact Jayne Shord, Van En Center coordinator at info@csacenter.org.

CSA Conference in New York

Mark your calendars! The third Northeast CSA conference will be held December 7-9, 2001 at Frost Valley YMCA in the Catskill region of New York. Conference planners are well into arranging workshops, intensive "schools", speakers, entertainment, food and exhibits. They are also raising funds for scholarships to entice out-of-region CSA farmers, shareholders and advocates. ●

Robyn Van En Center, Wilson College Center for Sustainable Living, 1015 Philadelphia Ave, Chambersburg PA 17201
phone 717-261-2880; e-mail info@csacenter.org
<http://www.csacenter.org> ●

The Midwest Anti-Drift Coalition

Not just for Midwesterners...

Ericka Dana, OCIA Certified Organic farmer and safe-food activist, has begun a national network based in Iowa called The Midwest Anti-Drift Coalition (MADCO) as a resource and support group for anyone who is concerned with pesticide contamination. This includes farmers, home-gardeners, drift-survivors, chemically sensitive people, prairie preservationists, those with environmental illness, consumers who don't want pesticides in or on their food and parents who don't want their children exposed to toxic chemicals in schools or on the ground where they play. Why is a national group named "Midwest?" Dana says, "Two reasons. I like the acronym, and the group started here in Iowa. But MADCO will encompass all aspects of the pesticide exposure issue and include all regions of the US and beyond." If you'd like to be included on the contact list, sign up by writing to Ericka at doodles@netins.net or Catnip Farm, PO Box 72, Victor, IA 52347. The MADCO resource website, www.StopDrift.org, is under construction. ●

Resources

The New Farmers' Market, Farm-Fresh Ideas to make Market Sales Sizzle is a new book from Eric Gibson, Vance Corum and Marcie Rosenzweig. In *The Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener*, Jean English call this "The definitive guide to farmers' markets..." \$24.95 + \$4.50 S/H to New World Publishing, 11543 Quartz Dr. #1, Auburn, CA 95602, 530/823-3886 (order line 888/281-5170)

Building Communities is a free booklet from Co-op America and the Social Investment Forum Foundation with information about avoiding predatory lenders and finding responsible community banking and borrowing options that help build communities. Order from Community Investing, 1612 K Street NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20006, 888/441-2406 or www.communityinvest.org.

CSA News from the Northeast

By Jayne Shord

While CSAs have been recruiting members, sowing fields and fighting spring weather conditions, the Robyn Van En Center (RVEC) has been busy with some significant projects of its own.

The big news is that the national CSA database, originally developed through the collaborative efforts of Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), RVEC and many other organizations involved in Community Supported Agriculture, is now under the control and management of the Robyn Van En Center. Up until now the database has been managed by the USDA/SAN; however, it is now housed on the web with an interface which will allow changes or additions to be made immediately rather than held for periodic updates. Many thanks go to Thor Lindstrom at Western SARE, Andy Clark and his team at SAN for helping to make this possible. Their support and guidance through the process of assuming control of the database has been instrumental in making it happen. If you haven't visited us recently or perhaps not at all, check out our website at www.csacenter.org. Please be sure to check out your listing to make sure that the information posted is accurate. For new CSAs, there is an entry form for posting your information.

Many other changes have occurred to the website as we continue to look for ways to support and strengthen the CSA movement:

- A bulletin board has been added for on-line postings of events, positions and general CSA information. Be sure to take advantage of the opportunity to post internships/job opportunities, up-coming events and general ideas for discussion.
- A technical assistance and support service has also been added which facilitates connections between those with knowledge and skills about CSA—farmers, "veteran" shareholders and extension professionals—and those who are seeking information, advice or support. The technical assistance providers listed at the site have completed questionnaires describing their expertise and the nature of their offerings. RVEC does not screen, exclude or endorse any providers. Some providers volunteer their services, while others will charge a fee. Because many of the services are provided over the phone or Internet, you are not limited to your state or region.

The third Northeast CSA Conference will be held

December 7-9, 2001 at the

Frost Valley Environmental Education Center in Claryville, New York. The conference will offer interactive workshops, expert troubleshooting advice,

intensive seminars and the opportunity to learn and share with 400-500 other people interested in Community Supported Agriculture.

Designed to help strengthen existing CSAs and help new ones get off to the right start, the program will provide a broad range of educational and networking opportunities for farmers, farm apprentices, CSA members, educators and representatives of non-profit and government agencies.

"I went to the last CSA conference with several members of my CSA core group, and we came back so excited and inspired that we made some really important improvements to our CSA," says Elizabeth Henderson, a farmer from New York and member of the 2001 conference steering committee.

New this year is a pre-conference, half-day "school" offering intensive, small-group sessions on CSA start-up, including technical assistance on legal, land-tenure and financial issues, and participatory working sessions to build a regional strategy for nurturing the CSA movement. The conference will also include trade show and display areas, youth programs, music, dancing, theater, and seasonal, regional food.

Frost Valley, about 2.5 hours from the George Washington Bridge and two hours from Albany, offers a variety of accommodations, including economical bunk, family and inn-style lodging. Conference costs, including two nights' lodging and six meals, will be between \$150 and \$280, depending on the style of lodging attendees choose.

Updated conference information will be posted at the Robyn Van En Center website at www.csacenter.org. To receive a registration packet (late summer) send an e-mail to bholtzman@together.net or write the Robyn Van En Center, Wilson College 1015 Philadelphia Ave., Chambersburg, PA 17201, 717/264-4141. Be sure to include your name and mailing address.



CSA in the News

I hope you didn't miss the article about CSA in the May/June issue of *Savour* magazine entitled "Fresh From the Farm." RVEC has received a deluge of inquiries from consumers in response to the article.

CSA will also be featured in another national publication, *Country Home*, in September. I will keep you apprised of articles as I become aware of them. If any appear in your local papers or come to your attention, please let me know so that we can continue to share the good news about CSA. In the meantime, have a wonderful summer. I'll be back to you in the next issue of *The Community Farm* with additional information on the CSA Conference. ☘

CSA News from the Northeast

Columbia University, speaks and writes on food and nutrition topics. Her

The good folks in the Northeast who usually contribute to this page are working diligently on the Northeast CSA Conference III. Consider making it to the Claryville, NY conference site December 7-9, especially if you have never been to a CSA conference before. These are simply not like any other conference you attend. Here you are interacting with folks who already know (or are there specifically to learn) quite a bit about CSA and you don't spend any time in the "what is CSA all about?" conversation that you get into at other conferences. We are all on the same page there, or at least in the same book! These events always leave us with renewed enthusiasm, new and specific information, and new friends. Core group member Alan Keitt (Plowshares CSA) wrote this after the last NE conference: "[It] has given a terrific boost to my often sluggish visioning process. One could feel the energy..."

The conference offers the opportunity to learn and share with nearly 400 other people interested in Community Supported Agriculture. It is designed for farmers, farm apprentices, CSA members, educators, and anybody interested in a more secure, sustainable food system. There will be nearly 50 workshops on topics from the nuts and bolts of farming to management issues, with some spiritual and philosophical workshops to please the visionary. Featured speakers include:

- **Gloria Decater**, Live Power Community Farm in California, will share insights into successful approaches to CSA in urban and rural communities, collaboration between CSA farms, and next steps for CSA organizations.
- **Joan Dye Gussow**, professor emerita at Teachers College,

most recent book is *This Organic Life: Confessions of a Suburban Homesteader*. Says one reviewer, "Gussow is one of the most important voices in the Real Food Movement."

- **Elizabeth Henderson** is "equally at home in front of a conference lectern or tractor seat," according to Fedco Seeds founder CR Lawn. Henderson grows 15 acres of vegetables, herbs and flowers for the 200-plus members of the Genesee Valley Organic CSA and co-authored *Sharing the Harvest, A Guide to Community Supported Agriculture* with Robyn Van En.
- **Michael Hamm**, associate professor at Rutgers University, has focused on nutrition, sustainable agriculture, environmental and community development issues.
- **Shane LaBrake**, farm manager at Ecosystem Farm in Maryland, runs an intensive farmer apprenticeship program. For more than 15 years he has been a farmer, writer and activist for small-scale and sustainable agriculture.
- **Kathy Lawrence** is executive director of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, and was the founding director of Just Food in New York City.

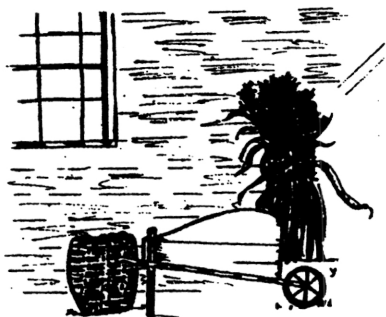
A pre-conference, half-day "school" offers intensive sessions on CSA start-up and participatory working sessions to build a regional strategy for nurturing the CSA movement.

The conference will be held at Frost Valley Environmental Education Center, which offers a variety of accommodations, including economical bunk, family and inn-style lodging.

Find the latest information, including registration materials and a rideshare bulletin board at www.csacenter.org, email csaconference@together.net or call 802-229-1441. ○

Organic Matters Series from ATTRA

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), with help from the Organic Farming Research Foundation, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, and the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, has introduced the Organic Matters publication series to speed the flow of technical information on current topics to organic farmers, researchers, and others involved in organic production. New publications are being added to the list, that currently includes an overview of organic production and specific publications with advice for organic fruit (apple, peach, pear, plum, blueberry, grape) production. Specific vegetables covered include asparagus, corn, tomato, sweet potato, lettuce/salad mix, and alliums. New guides to conservation tillage systems and hog production have been published, and several specific pest control guides are available. There is also information on potting mixes, greenhouse production, manure handling, suppliers and more. All publications are free online at www.attra.org or by calling 800/346-9140 (weekdays) for a printed copy. ○



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CSA News from the Northeast

By Jayne Shord

The year 2000 was a very busy year at the Robyn Van En Center. One of our biggest undertakings was the mailing of the first national CSA census to 1,014 farms across the country. There are still some holdouts, however, that have not responded. If you are one and that census might be stashed away in the "to do" pile on your desk, please return it to me as soon as possible. If by chance it has been misplaced—or if this is the first you have heard about the census—please contact me as soon as possible at 717/261-2880 or info@csacenter.org and I will forward one to your attention.

The census information is relevant for two reasons. First, the database for the website will be updated within a few weeks and I want to assure that your farm is listed. Second, researchers are compiling the information supplied on those forms to build a better understanding of CSA. A report will be issued and we will be providing you with some general statistics on CSA. Information will be held in the strictest confidence, but your input is essential to gain a greater overall picture.

For the time being, however, as I read through your census forms it occurs to me that there is much more to share than just statistics. What's going on out there is exciting! There are as many different ideas as there are numbers of CSAs. The creative energy and ingenuity that exists is something that can be learned from, so in this issue of *Community Farm* and in issues to come I will be sharing some of these ideas with you—ideas which might be useful as you plan for the coming year. For this issue, we will list some of the special events that are held across the nation.

SPRING

- Scarecrow making and pot luck
- Spring potluck to introduce farmers and members
- Seed choosing party
- Bonfire and potluck
- Pancake supper using local syrup
- Planting blessing ceremony

- Farm bird walk
- May Day celebration
- Environmental Sabbath prayer service
- Prairie smoke festival

SUMMER

Plantings/Pickings

- Strawberry picking
- U-picks
- Bean threshing party and potluck
- Pumpkin, gourd or potato plantings with potlucks

Tastings

- Heirloom tomato tasting event
- Mid-season melon tasting
- Kale cook-off

Festivals

- Ice Cream Social
- Basil festival: includes musicians, pesto tasting and flower picking
- Corn boil/roast and pea picking
- Weed walks
- Farm festivals, utilizing CSA members' talents
- Make your own bouquet work parties, members bring and play musical instruments
- Solstice farm tour and picnic

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Garlic festival; garlic planting party
- Popcorn shucking dinner
- Wassail party in orchard
- Women's fire circle
- Fairy party
- Chili supper and contra dance

Harvest events

- Potluck and barn dance with caller
- Party at a restaurant that buys from the CSA
- Feast in November to get early commitments for the coming year
- Barbeque
- Farm workday and festival
- Pick your own pumpkin party/pumpkin gleanings, cider pressing, bonfire and story telling, hayrides
- Winter squash or Sweet potato dig

CHILDREN

- Farm exploration program

- Halloween/Nature walks
- Planting of children's garden: plant wildflowers, pole bean teepee, paint garden veggie ID signs
- Planting and harvest days for children and parents
- School group tours and classes
- Kids day to include bug catching, potato digging and nature walk

EDUCATION

- Cooking and food handling classes, to include: classes on preserving, drying, canning, vegetarian dishes, salsas, bread making, vinegars, tomato sauce, beer brewing, medicinal herbs, pasta making

Internships

- for "Wanna be" urban farmers
- for women
- Field days for regional interns
- Coordinated sustainable ag intern training program between area farms

Educational or training programs

- For disadvantaged and at risk teens
- Tours and seminars: composting, IPM, weed control, soil fertility and plant disease control
- Master Gardener demo gardens
- Sustainability workshops
- Sheep shearing demonstration
- Herb and biodynamic conferences

THROUGH THE SEASON

- Birthday parties for members
- Weekly breakfasts for working share holders and assistants
- Member weekends at the farm
- Open houses, potlucks, farm tours

If you would like additional information from farms that have held these events, contact me for contact information. In the next issue of *The Community Farm*, I will provide you with some of the low-income ideas that have been instituted. Best wishes to you and yours for a healthy and prosperous new year. ☺

Jayne is Project Manager at the Robyn Van En Center, Wilson College, 1015 Philadelphia Ave, Chambersburg, PA 17201, 717/261-2880 info@csacenter.org, www.csacenter.org

News from the Robyn Van En Center

Speakers' Listing and Technical Support Network Expansion

By Stephanie Repp, Robyn Van En Center

Since May 2002, over 20,000 people have accessed the national directory of CSA farms we manage on our website at the Robyn Van En Center! As the CSA movement continues to grow, so does the need for farmers, Extension professionals, and other individuals who are willing to share their expertise. To that end, we are working to build a national network of support services for CSA. In addition to administering the second national CSA census, we are in the process of compiling a speakers' bureau and a technical support database.

We continue to receive inquiries from reporters who are promoting CSA, and we would love to be able to refer them to farmers who are willing to be interviewed. Those of you who indicated on your 2001 census form that you would consider being a speaker or being interviewed about CSA have been included in our listing of possible speakers. We will refer to this listing when we receive inquiries from reporters and conference organizers. If you would like your farm to be included on this list, and you did not indicate this on the 2001 census form, please let us know.

In addition to the speakers' listing, we are also working to

expand our technical support database. The majority of farmers and Extension professionals currently listed on this database are located in the Northeastern US; however, we are working to expand this listing to a national level. Farmers, Extension professionals, or other individuals who agree to be listed, have offered to provide advice or to suggest referrals to new or existing CSA farmers. You may choose to provide your services on a voluntary basis, or to negotiate a fee with the inquirer. The technical support list is currently available by mail, phone, and via our website. Those seeking your advice will contact you directly. If you are interested in providing technical assistance and support to new and existing CSA farms, please let us know. We will mail you a form to complete regarding what type of help you are willing to provide, your availability and fee scale, etc. You may also enter this information yourself by following the "Services" link on our website at www.csacenter.org. If you indicated on your 2001 census form that you are interested in providing technical assistance to CSA farms in your region, you will be receiving a form to complete (either in the mail or via email) in the near future.

If you have any questions regarding our speakers' listing or the technical support database, call the Robyn Van En Center at (717) 264-4141, ext. 3352, or email info@csacenter.org.

(Continued from page 3)

farm transfer options. Wisconsin Farm Center, PO Box 8911, Madison, WI 53708-8911, 800-942-2474

Profitable Practices & Strategies for a New Generation includes 8 case studies of beginning farmers and how they worked with existing landowners to transfer ownership along with 10 other case studies on strategies to increase profits in producing or selling crops and products, and profitable cooperative arrangements of product marketing and equipment sharing. Available for sale through the Center for Rural Affairs, PO Box 406 Walthill, NE 68067 402/846-5428 e-mail: info@cfra.org. The individual case studies will soon be available on the web at www.farmprofitability.org

American Farmland Trust's mission is to "to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment." For assistance on estate planning and land preservation contact AFT, 1200 18th St. NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C., 202/331-7300, info@farmland.org, www.farmland.org/

The Land Trust Alliance, <http://www.lta.org> provides information and resources to land trusts

Farm Estate and Business Planning by Neil E. Harl (15th edition, 2001) provides deep reading on the retiring side. Frequently updated. \$28 includes shipping and handling. Contact Doane Agricultural Services Inc. 1-800-535-2342 ext. 20 or Neil E. Harl, harl@iastate.edu

http://www.cfra.org/resources/Beg_Farmer_loan_programs.htm describes a USDA program for beginning farmer loans.

On Good Land by Michael Ableman offers a case study of the preservation of Fairview Gardens CSA along with farming tips, highly readable prose, and great photography. Chronicle Books, 1998. Available from Fairview Gardens, 805-967-7369 or bookstores. More information at www.fairviewgardens.org



Energy Efficiency Tips

Farm Bill 2002 and Energy

The 2002 Farm Bill includes programs for direct financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and rural small businesses for wind generators and other renewable energy systems, including methane generation and ethanol and biodiesel production. "Farmers," says Ed Woolsey of the Iowa Renewable Energy Association, "have a new financial opportunities to... diversify their operations in an environmentally-friendly way. Energy is an entirely new market for agriculture...that has virtually unlimited demand." Farm based renewable energy projects are now considered "value-added agricultural products" under the Bill's Rural Development Title, making them eligible for competitive grants. The Bill also includes provision for assistance for farm energy audits. Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) expects to release a new series of ag energy publications beginning this fall. ATTRA can also help with questions on energy issues and energy provisions of the Farm Bill. Call 800/346-9140. More information from the USDA at www.usda.gov/farmbill. A summary of the clean energy provisions of the Farm Bill is on-line at www.elpc.org. Other ag energy grant and loan information at www.sustainable.doe.gov/financing/intro.shtml

The View from Five Springs Farm

As we put this newsletter together we hear lots of great ideas. But we don't always implement them—even the ones that sound especially good to us. We have been dancing around the idea of a multi-farm CSA for years now. We even made a couple of attempts, but our members didn't seem very interested at the time. Lately there has been an increased interest around our neighborhood in both CSA and local, organic food. After researching the concept for the Winter Issue (*The Community Farm* # 16) we were ready to try again. So we called up a few farmers and ask them to join us in supplying food this season. We had the meeting that week and within the month we were ready to send out our 'Off-farm Shares' brochure offering sweet corn, eggs, an assortment of berries, bread and even Thanksgiving Turkeys. The response of our members has been very good, and—by coincidence?—an organic orchardist just called and would offer organic apples and cherries. Like Doreen says in her book review on page 9, "Lots

of us put [things] off ...to a time in the future when we'll have more time, more help, more space, more anything." This was the time to start and it all fell into place without a hitch.

One of our CSA neighbors had a similar, perhaps more dramatic, experience when they needed some help and advice on a tricky farm issue. They called in some of their most committed members and put it to them, wondering whether that was a good idea, how they might respond. The result? It "was pretty incredible!" The group went beyond the problem at hand and discussed helping with organization, hands-on farm work and other farm issues.

CSA farmer and writer Elizabeth Henderson would not be surprised. As a tireless advocate of more involvement in the farm, she suggests that "One of the greatest weaknesses I see in CSA farms is in our failure to ask enough of our members."

The point? Try it out! If a new idea catches your interest, give it a go. In many cases there will be little to lose but some time and effort, and the gains might just surprise you.

SECOND NATIONAL CSA CENSUS NOW IN PROGRESS

By Stephanie Repp Project Manger Robyn Van En Center

In November 1999, the regional CSA data collection project that began in the Northeast several years ago blossomed into a national effort by the USDA and many collaborating organizations to collect information about CSA farms. As a result, two major CSA programs were developed: the National CSA web-based database and the National CSA census.

The Robyn Van En Center (RVEC) has played a key part in the development of each of these projects. The database, initially compiled by the USDA, RVEC and other organizations, was turned over to RVEC for management in May 2001. The web-based directory is continually updated with revisions or additions entered as they are received. To give you an idea of how the database has grown over the past two years, when the database was launched in 1999, 352 confirmed CSAs were listed. Today the number is approaching 800. You will find the on-line database located at www.csacenter.org.

RVEC was also instrumental in developing the first national CSA census, which was mailed in March 2000. The results of the census will soon be available for review on our website.

It's hard to imagine that two years have passed since these important projects were initiated. In order to keep our information up-to-date and our database current, it is necessary for

us to ask you to periodically update your records. We recently sent the second national CSA census to all CSAs known to RVEC. Please be assured that the information collected from this survey will be recorded and maintained anonymously and only made available to researchers, writers and others by request. Even though you may be apprehensive about answering some questions, your responses are VERY important and will be valuable in learning more about CSA. If you have not yet returned your questionnaire, please return it to RVEC as soon as possible. If you did not receive a copy of the questionnaire, please contact us at RVEC and we will mail you a copy.

CSA T-SHIRTS

The CSA t-shirt designed for the 2001 Northeast Community Supported Agriculture Conference is now available, with artwork that was donated by New York CSA Gardener Karen Kerney. Shirts, made in the USA of unbleached cotton, cost \$15 each plus shipping. Shirt sizes: S, M, L, XL. Grocery bags are also available in 10 oz. Unbleached cotton canvas (18" w x 15" h) at \$10 each plus shipping. Printing is available in either burgundy or forest green.

These items offer a beautiful and functional way to support the Robyn Van En Center and promote your CSA. Use them as premiums for early sign-up; include them as part of their share; be creative!

Please contact the Robyn Van En Center at 717-264-4141,

ext. 3352, or email info@csacenter.org with any questions, or with your t-shirt and grocery bag orders. You can also download an order form from our website at www.csacenter.org.

Thanks in advance for your participation and support. Best wishes for a bountiful season!

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The Community Farm is a forum dedicated to preserving small farms and building community from the perspective of community supported agriculture (CSA). CSA is a partnership that provides a direct link and shared responsibility between growers and consumers. The Community Farm is published quarterly for delivery near cross-quarter days (halfway between solstices and equinoxes): Candlemas (February 1), Beltane (May 1), Lammastide (August 1) and Samhain (November 1). One year subscription: \$20.00, \$26.00 in Canadian funds or overseas. For subscription information, change of address, advertising or submissions call (231)889-3216 or write The Community Farm, 3480 Potter Rd., Bear Lake, MI 49614. Email: csafarm@jacqueline.com or on the internet at: <http://tcf.fgo.com>. Copyright © Solstice Partnership 2002, except as noted. Please contact us for permission to reproduce any portion of The Community Farm. Editorial Staff: Jim Sloyter, Jo Heller. Original Graphics: Jo Heller. Information in The Community Farm is believed to be accurate but readers assume responsibility for actions based on this information. Use of specific product and company names implies neither endorsement of these nor criticism of the companies or products not mentioned. printed on recycled paper. ISSN 1522-7642

... from the Robyn Van En Center

Cultivating Good Communication

By Stephanie Repp

Operating a CSA farm is certainly not an easy job. It takes a lot of drive, skill and enthusiasm to maintain a CSA farm. Even if you have been operating a successful farm for many years, it is vital to keep an open line of communication with your members. Not only will good communication help you retain current members, but you may also get valuable feedback from your members that could help you to better meet their needs. Although this may seem like common sense, in the midst of meeting the multitude of needs related to your farm, communication is something that could easily slip through the cracks.

Before the season begins, it is a good idea to have a group meeting with all potential members of the CSA to educate them about how this arrangement works. It is important to be very clear with potential shareholders about the fact that members will be sharing in both the bounty AND the risks of farming. If your harvests suffer due to an intense drought, are you confident that your shareholders will understand and remain committed to with the farm? For a variety of reasons, most CSA's experience a moderate turnover in their membership every year. You will most likely have fewer disgruntled shareholders if your members have been well educated about the nature of CSA farms.

Personal contact between the farmers and the members is an important aspect of communication within a CSA operation. Throughout the season, workdays, potlucks, and harvest festivals are great opportunities for members to develop a connection with the farm. Occasions such as these also allow a time and space for you and your members to get to know each other. You don't need a formal event to maintain communication with your members. Hosting a simple tour of the farm is one way to enhance members' knowledge of and connection to you and your farm.

farm. Distribution systems such as these require even more attention to communication. If members are not coming out to the farm, perhaps not even meeting the farmers, it is crucial to keep them informed of things such as farm needs, crop updates, upcoming harvests, and the weather's effect on crops. Whether this may occur through the use of a newsletter, or a short weekly update sheet, keeping your membership advised of the farm happenings will keep them up-to-date.

Whatever methods you choose, keeping the lines of communication open by meeting members, getting their feedback, and answering their questions will ultimately improve the long-term relationship between yourself, your farm, and your members.

If you would like specific assistance with your CSA communications, please contact the Robyn Van En Center, one of the farmers listed in our Technical Assistance and Support Network at www.csacenter.org, or one of the Extension agents we have listed in that same Network.

We are still looking for people who are interested in providing technical assistance and support to other CSA farmers. Please look at the "Service" page on our website at www.csacenter.org, call us at (717) 264-4141, ext. 3352, or email info@csacenter.org for more information about this Network.

Communications Toolkits from FoodRoutes

This is an important time to teach Americans about where their food comes from, and why change is needed in our food system. FoodRoutes Network has produced a communications toolkit, *Where Does Your Food Come From? Recipes for Communicating Effectively About American Agriculture*, to help you and your organization effectively reach your audience.

The toolkit includes:

- Focus group research from farmers.
- A step-by-step guide to create a strategic communications plan for your initiatives.
- How-to tips from communications experts on work-

ute their produce to drop-off points in areas surrounding their

DRIP IRRIGATION

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Another new toolkit from FoodRoutes Network is "Harvesting Support for Locally Grown Food: Lessons Learned from the 'Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown' Campaign. FoodRoutes Network and Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) have produced a toolkit designed for individuals and organizations who are interested in learning about the approach CISA uses to promote locally grown food through a multi-media marketing campaign. \$50.

Order either toolkit at www.FoodRoutes.org (follow the easy links) or call (814) 349-6000 ext. 4

Growing Our Food, Building Our Movement, Changing Our World:

The 2001 Northeast Community Supported Agriculture Conference

Elizabeth Henderson

The opening keynote speakers, Gloria and Steve Decatur from Live Power Community Farm in California, told the story of their farming since 1973, and of founding the first CSA in California in 1988. Gloria spoke to the central theme for the conference, reading from a Hopi poem that announces the end of the "era of the lone wolf," and concludes: "We are the ones we have been waiting for!" Steve emphasized how important it is for CSAs to ask more of their members, "providing a context for giving," for it is through participation that they will find their heart in the garden.

Here are highlights from some of the sessions I and my partners Greg Palmer and Ammie Chickering attended:

Involving Shareholders and Volunteers in Farm Work: Don Zasada of the Food Project described how they involve 1000 volunteers from clubs and schools in farm work. Scott

Chaskey's Quail Hill Farm requires its members to harvest most of their own shares, as well as trading food for critical skills. Greg and Ammie told about how we require all CSA members to either work on the farm and distribution, or participate in the Core Group. **Working with Lower Income Populations:** The Hartford Food System Farm provides half of its production to 12 community organizations at ¼ of the regular price, customizing the mix of produce to the particular ethnic group. NOFA Vermont helps connect farmers with low income families, and raises funds through an annual Share the Harvest Day dinner at 100 restaurants which donate 15% of their gross. Just Food recruits community organizations in NYC to form CSAs with regional farmers. Several members of these groups described how they attract community residents using photos of the food and price comparisons to highlight the advantages of CSA.

Building a Core Group: Gloria Decatur described how her San Francisco Core Group raised the money to purchase the development rights on her farm. I shared the job descriptions of our Core members to highlight how people are more likely to take jobs when they know how much time is involved, and if they have enough responsibility to derive satisfaction from doing a job well. Both of us emphasized that farms do not ask enough of their members.

The Fair Wage Question: John Hendrickson (Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems) led a group of 12 farmers in a discussion of what we earn now (\$10 to \$20 an hour), what we

would like to earn, and the market constraints on raising CSA prices. Several of us shared methods we use (sliding scales, scholarship funds) to avoid pricing low-income people out of our CSAs.

Building the Farm Community: Sue Andersen (Good Earth CSA) relies on neighborhood clusters with members helping to recruit their friends through house parties. Quail Hill Farm holds a well-publicized annual breakfast at the farm, luring new members with delicious food, and welcoming each new member with special attention.

Children on the Farm: There is a lot of interest in learning how to organize children's activities on farms. Farmers worry about liability. Greg and Ammie focused on how we involve the 100 plus children who come to our farm, and on keeping the farm safe for children.

A Full Plate: Multi-Farm CSAs: Eric Wells (Erik's Pastured Poultry) pastures his poultry in the fields of Intervale CSA and sells chicken shares to its members. Jan Libby described how several CSAs in Iowa offer shares and products from multiple farms (see Page 1, "The Multi-farm CSA" for more on this). Ryan Voiland and Rich Pascale described how five farms supply the shares together for Common Wealth CSA. I was deeply

moved by their internal pricing system, which allows them to pay more to their oldest farmers, Juanita and Wally Nelson, in appreciation for their wisdom and experience.

Tracie Smith

I left the conference with a new idea that I have already begun to put into effect. I had mulled over ways of involving lower income families in the CSA, but I did not know exactly how to go about it. This issue was brought up during a few of the workshops.

One approach is a sliding scale, where members can pay anywhere from a greater to lesser amount for their share, depending on what they think they can afford. They make members aware of the fact that the higher end of the scale would offset the cost for those who could not afford to pay as much for the share. Many farmers said it worked well for them.

Other farms set up scholarship funds, to which members can donate money. This money is used to reduce the cost of shares for lower income families. Some farms organize fundraisers—breakfasts, dinners or gatherings in general—to raise money for the scholarship program. I have decided to start out with the scholarship program by donating \$30 from the farm towards the scholarship program. On the farm sign-up form members can indicate if they would like to donate money to the fund. It will be interesting to see how this goes!

(Continued on next page)



(Continued from page 5)

From your Editors, Jim and Jo

To us, a CSA conference is as much a reaffirmation of what we are doing and an enormously fun thing to do as it is a learning experience. But learn we always do. For example, even at our tender ages just over and just under 50, the question of what will happen to the farm and the land when we shuffle off (the land or the "mortal coil") is beginning to nag. In fact, Kathy Ruhf (New England Small Farm Institute) and Elizabeth Smith (Caretaker Farm) suggest that this is just the time to start the process that will involve legal, financial and community support to work. There are alternatives to selling the farm to developers, and we hope to provide more insight into this complex issue in a future article.

Jim will implement a variation on Steve Gilman's (Ruckytucks Farm) "bio-strips" next season. Rather than leave the trails between growing beds as bare ground (subject to frequent weeding and potential erosion), Steve maintains them in a grass/clover mixture that holds the soil, adds nitrogen and provides clippings for use as mulch or compost.

In the **Mentoring and Support Networks for Farmers** Jim Hayes (Sapbush Hollow Farm) told of getting frequent re-

quests to mentor new farmers, as do we. As a practical man, he first gives them a reading list and tells them to come back after they read the material—and prepare a business plan. Weeks, months (or years) later the prospective farmer returns and the lessons begin. Patience is the lesson Jo learned from the workshop: "Now I realize that a mentoring relationship may go on for years, and the new farmer must find his or her own pace."

The **Virtual Tour of a Small CSA** was a "lean back and watch" slide show of an established CSA in Vermont that gave Jo an "a-ha" moment. "The scene of two pigs cleaning up a weed-infested garden made me wonder if we needed a couple on our farm." Suzanne Long (Luna Bleu Farm) uses them during the season to clean garden areas then ships them off in the fall. She said that the members love them.

The walking tour of **Green Design in an Institutional Setting** was a great learning experience for us but Jo was happy to learn about the composting toilets found in two of the dorms, "which is exactly what I am researching for our farm. Who would think that you can even learn this at a farm conference?"

Some of these sessions were taped. Contact the Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources, 717/264-4141 x3352, jshord@wilson.edu (www.csacenter.org) to get copies. ¶

Going to Seed—Part Two: Organic Seed

With the implementation of the new organic rules from the USDA next October certified organic growers must use organic seed if it is "commercially available." If not using organic seed, growers will have to document their attempt to find it. While farmers wait for final interpretation of what this actually means, and while seed companies gear up (hopefully) to meet this new demand, it makes sense to start looking at the whole issue of seed production.

Less than 1/10 of 1% of commercially grown seed on the market is organically grown, according to Co-op America's *Real Money* (Spring 2000). Furthermore, "the commercial seed trade is one of the heaviest users of pesticides and fertilizers in the agriculture industry." Organic seed is available, but usually in small or modest quantities, relatively few varieties, and often at a cost that can only be sustained at the small garden level. On the other hand, it seems disingenuous to ask consumers to pay a premium for organically grown food at the same time that growers resist the added cost of organic seeds.

The 2002 seed catalogues are in. Several—including Fedco, Johnny's, Bountiful Gardens and others—have added to their line of organic seed, and are pointing it out prominently. Fedco and Bountiful Gardens as well as many small seed companies also offer seeds from small producers who may be using organic principles but are not certified. But organic seed remains only a small part of most seed catalogues. Fedco offers the largest-ever selection of organic seed at 65 varieties. "Small-farm" grown seed constitutes 14.4% of the varieties in Fedco's

catalogue (up from 9.3% in 1998) with a commitment to increase that to 20% over the next five years. At Johnny's, organic seed is "up by 50% compared to last year," according to Eva Littlefield, and demand is on the rise. Will there be more organic seed next year? "Most definitely," predicts Littlefield.

Still, Fedco founder C.R. Lawn is concerned about the new seed rules. The requirement for organic growers to use organic seed was unanticipated, as few certifying agencies had such a rule. "While the intent is laudable...its impact may not be," according to Lawn. "The seed industry is far from ready. Organic seed is in short supply...and almost completely unavailable for those hybrid varieties which are commercial mainstays."

Since the seed industry is demand-driven, an increase in farmers' demand for organic seed might result in an increase in production. Lawn is concerned, though, about a "different...outcome: a slowing of the surge in demand for organic seed" if growers decide to abandon certification or if "farmers and certifiers use the loophole lurking in the vague concept of 'availability.'"

Several growers we have contacted will be using more organic seed this year. But with most organic seed available by the packet rather than by the pound, widespread adoption of organic seed is likely to be slow. One solution? Grow your own. We will discuss this side of the seed equation next time. For a list of seed suppliers that include organic seed in their catalogues, write *The Community Farm*, visit our website at <http://tcf.itgo.com> or email csafarm@jackpine.com. ATTRA lists many seed sources at: <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/altseed.html> or call 800/346-9140. The listing indicates whether seed is organic and other information. The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) Certified Organic Seed and Planting Stock List is under construction at http://omri.org/OMRI_SEED_list.html Q