

# *The Witness*

Volume 82 • Numbers 1-2 • Jan./Feb. 1999



*Community food security*

## The earth's song

AS SOMEONE WHO IS CURRENTLY contemplating a mid-life career change to the environmental field, I really enjoyed the ecologically oriented October issue. I also think that Marianne Arbogast's excellent profile of Anne Cox demonstrates that while the institutional church may serve Episcopalians well on many levels, there still can be satisfying and life-enhancing alternatives to it.

**Paul Winters**  
Framingham, MA

Letters



PLEASE REMOVE OUR SUBSCRIPTION in the name of the former rector of this parish. Reason, if one is needed: *The Witness* has gone off the rails, particularly in two instances, the advert for erospirit, a peddler of

smut; and the article about the Wiccan priestess making a neo-pagan brew. I do not wish to be exposed to yet another issue.

**Paul E. Cosby**  
Columbus, GA

I ORIGINALLY ASKED for the sample copy because I thought my partner, who is more religious-minded than I, would like it. Strangely enough, it is I, the atheist, who has read it cover to cover. The issue where you interviewed the witch and people with other ideas was great! I really love nature and have always said that gardening was my religion. How neat to see so many different ideas reflected in your magazine! I just got your subscription letter and would really like to sign up. My partner and I both have disabilities, though, and we are on a very tight income. Is it possible to have a free or low-charge subscription sent?

**Kelly Sterns**  
Albuquerque, NM

[Ed. note: Yes. Low-income subscriptions cost \$15.]

## Classifieds

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### Classifieds

*Witness* classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication.

## E-mail Bible study

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU for the wonderful ministry you have lifted up with your magazine! It has enriched my understanding of my own spiritual journey, and stretched me to search for what Christ calls me to be in community with others. We have also begun an e-mail Bible study for our college students, using your magazine and the corresponding study guides as a starting point. What started with a group of 12 has now grown to 35 students spread out across the country. May God bless this ministry and its staff and may God's grace continue to be revealed to us through your work.

**Sam McDonald**  
Chagrin Falls, OH

## Witness praise

THANKS SO MUCH FOR *THE WITNESS*. I find I go back to some articles for continued reflection — especially those on subjects I didn't want to think about!

**Anne Shaw**  
Warrenton, VA

EVER SINCE *CHRISTIANITY AND CRISIS* folded in 1993 — I had been reading it for more than 25 years — I had been looking for a replacement. Your magazine has been the only one I've found that came near. Since I am a United Methodist I am not completely familiar with the Episcopal Church, but that hasn't made the magazine less useful to me. Thank you for being there.

Eliza Brunson  
Mobile, AL

## Sanctions and hypocrisy

THE U.S. JUST RECALLED the bombers in mid-flight again from going eyeball to eyeball with Saddam Hussein. This seems to be a continuation of our semi-annual crisis with Iraq. The U.S. has effectively pressured the United Nations to maintain sanctions on Iraq, even after Iraq agreed to allow inspections last year. We have literally insisted that every conceivable building in Iraq be inspected before a lifting of the sanctions is approved. Frustrated with the delays and aware of the consequences of the sanctions on Iraq's population, Iraq's ambassador to the U.N. stated, "They [U.S.] will not kill in a military strike more than they are killing with sanctions every day."

Our policy on Iraq is taking a heavy toll on the lives of Iraq's citizens. According to UNICEF, 150 children are dying daily from malnutrition and illnesses, and since the war ended over one-half million children under the age of five have died. It seems that we care more for our oil interests in the Gulf than we care for the lives of a whole generation of Iraq's children.

The U.S. claims that we are making the Gulf region safe from Hussein's madness by limiting his ability to build and use weapons of mass destruction. Yet it was the U.S. and European countries that sold Iraq the weapons of mass destruction in the first place. In fact, if Iraq were to fire a biological weapon, the missile would probably be from Russia, upgraded by German technology and loaded with a U.S.-supplied bacteria strain. What hypocrisy! The U.S. has the largest stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in the world. We are the only ones to have used nuclear weapons on civilian populations and yet we justify the annihilation of a generation of



children by claiming we want to stop the potential use of weapons of mass destruction.

That many American people have learned to hate Saddam Hussein and seem willing to watch further violence rain down on Iraq's people attests to the degree of demonization the government, through our national media, has so effectively generated against Hussein. He is likened to Hitler and deemed a crazed killer using the bodies of his people to protect himself, and some of us are willing to accept a half million deaths as justifiable if it will hasten Hussein's downfall. A half million dead children is not an acceptable cost to overthrow any government!

CIA covert action in the Gulf continues to wage a war of economic sanctions and dirty tricks. Internal and external plots to overthrow Hussein are part of our continuing war

against Iraq. Bundestag Presseb in Germany reported last summer that the screwworm epidemic in Iraq, which is devastating Iraq's livestock populations, broke out in 12 of Iraq's 18 provinces, starting in the no-fly zone controlled by the U.S. The sanctions against Iraq include the chemical counter-agents necessary to control the screwworm. Would a CIA that was aware that the Contras were shipping cocaine into U.S. cities deliberately seed screwworm flies into Iraq, destroying their livestock population to undermine Hussein? We should not have to question our government's moral position, but unfortunately that is no longer the case in America.

Peter Phillips  
Rohnert Park, CA

[Phillips is director of Project Censored at Sonoma State University.]



# The Witness

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*The Witness* offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece of art.

**Manuscripts:** We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The editor whose editorial appears on page 5 crafted this issue.

*Cover: Supper at Emmaus by Caravaggio, 1600-01, National Gallery, London.*

*Back cover: Still life with peaches, 50A.D., Museo Nazionale Naples/Scala*

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# Community food security: just food

by Anne E. Cox

*...They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.*

— Isaiah 65:21-22a

A t a contributing editors' meeting about a year ago, we surfaced "food" as a topic *The Witness* would do well to cover. We laughed about filling the pages of the magazine with favorite recipes for church potlucks, complete with tuna hot dish, or how to make a politically correct stew. But when we began to unpack the topic, it was clearly not light and frivolous. We could look at the politics of food, eating disorders, dietary laws, global anti-hunger work, what it means to eat seasonally and locally, labor issues, agribusiness, the food service industry.

Clearly, food is a juicy topic: What we did not know at that meeting last February is that a whole movement is currently coalescing around the topic of food, that may well revitalize Left politics. The Community Food Security Coalition is a young coalition — four years old, with many of its members in their 20s and 30s — with the simple mission of assuring a sustainable supply of healthy food. But this simple mission gets into every single justice issue there can be as one begins to unpack what a sustainable supply of healthy food is.

Start with the fact that we all need food

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Anne E. Cox is a contributing editor to *The Witness* and lives in Tenants Harbor, Me.

to live, and it's clear that food is not a topic just about poverty — as much anti-hunger work is — but one that cuts across economic divisions. Inside of this is the question of access to food. How "food secure" are we?

Do we have a reliable, non-emergency supply of food? From here we move to the question of the basic food groups we

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*Food is an organizing topic that can bring together environmental, anti-hunger, community economic development, health, agriculture concerns — basically everyone who has begun to smell a rat in the way things are working.*

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should have to be healthy and vigorous. Are our children, in particular, receiving proper nourishment? Are we eating whole foods or highly processed, high-fat, high-salt foods?

Inside the issue of nutrition is the question of what went into the production of the food. Is the food organic? Or is it grown with the benefit of chemicals or genetic engineering and how is it processed?

Follow the question of how the food we eat is produced and we get to the overall environmental impact of various

agricultural practices — organic vrs. "conventional" agriculture, small low-impact farms vs. large, "efficient" factory farms. And embedded in this is the economic impact of farming practices: When small hog farmers are put out of business by large agribusinesses that can underprice their product, whole communities and cultures are disrupted.

And here's where the conversation about food loops back on itself: Are we ruining the environment and losing diversified agricultural knowledge so that eventually we will not be able to produce food at all? Food is an organizing topic that can bring together environmental, anti-hunger, community economic development, health, agriculture concerns — basically everyone who has begun to smell a rat in the way things are working. And it's clearly something in which we all have a stake.

Food security is embedded in the Christian tradition, starting with the creation stories in Genesis in which we are given "every green plant for food" (Gen. 1:30) in affirmation that there is an abundance of what we need to survive. We hold onto the vision of new heavens and new earth at the end of Isaiah that includes food for all, not exploited laborers producing food for others while they starve themselves. And we dwell in the truth of Emmaus that we most know the risen Christ when we bless, break and eat bread at table together.

Perhaps community food security is the recipe many have been looking for to mobilize for concrete changes in the economic and environmental ways we operate in this country.

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*editor's note*

# Sacred meals, everyday meals

by Peter Mann

At the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, the sacred ritual of Sunday eucharist unfolds in the usual way. Ministers process in, songs and readings are delivered, bread and wine prepared, and the aromas from candles and incense fill the great space. Unexpectedly, other smells intrude, from vegetable stew or roast lamb wafting up from the soup kitchen downstairs where a meal is being prepared for hundreds of New York's homeless and working poor.

The ministry of Jesus is shaped by meals. As companion at table, his dealings with people liberate them and bring joy: It is impossible to fast in his presence (Mark 2:18-22). As host at the miraculous meals of multiplication of loaves and fishes, his presence reveals the sheer abundance of God's blessings. Jesus is revealed as bread of life, the true vine, life-giving water. He is the host who "takes and blesses" the food, and the servant who "breaks and gives" it to those at table (Mark 6:41, 14:22).

Thus, the reign of God comes to us in the form of food and drink, as sacred meals. Yet it is easy to miss the transforming power of these meals in the Gospel stories and, potentially, in our own lives. As open table fellowship, not based on spiritual or political hierarchy, prestige or power, they represented a radical form of sharing in which God's outflowing justice and reconciliation were being revealed. Hence, Jesus' table fellowship was rightly perceived as undermining political power and religious law. They led to a Last Supper in which Christ's

death was made present in the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup.

It has always been difficult to retain this transformative power of the eucharist as a sacred meal, one which looks back to

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*One way to rediscover the power of the eucharist is to see it globally and locally, to situate it again within our food system.*

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these original meals, makes present the Lord's Supper, and looks forward to the future messianic banquet. Already inequality had entered into the early Christian community at Corinth. The well-off had enough to eat; the poor went hungry. The ritual passing of the cup and breaking of the bread became separated from the real meal. The social and spiritual transformation inherent in the sacred meal — its power to heal and bring together — were endangered (1Cor. 11:17-34).

One way to rediscover the power of the eucharist as sacred meal is to see it globally and locally, to situate it again within our food system. Where is our food coming from? Who controls the food system? Who is growing the food we eat? How safe, healthful and nourishing is our food? It is a corporate, market-driven food system which produces abundant food and at the same time great scarcity. More than 800 million people in the world go hungry, and hunger is growing even in the rich metropolis of New York City, where soup kitchens and food pantries have increased from a handful in 1981 to more than 1100 today. The inequality between haves and have-nots,

between the well-fed and overfed and the malnourished, intensifies.

Only as we become aware of our food system can the transformative power of sacred meals come into play. Think about the emergency food system, exemplified in the soup kitchen at St. John the Divine. The churches are deeply involved in feeding the hungry and see it as following Christ (Mt. 25:35) and living out the meaning of the eucharist. They share not just food, but also caring and respect. Nevertheless, emergency feeding in soup kitchens and food pantries is ultimately about charity, not justice. However necessary in our present crisis, it does not reach the root causes of hunger and poverty and may even leave these structural causes more intact as governments and corporations retreat from their responsibilities. The sacred meal is not only about giving charity, but building justice, which means changing radically a food system which creates the need for emergency feeding.

Finally, sacred meals have become separated from our family meals. Fast food has spread into the lives of our kids; meals have become deritualized and have lost their socializing power; people eat alone in front of a television. The sharing and empathy associated with sacred meals — think of the eucharist or the Passover seder — is not shaping our everyday meals.

All of these crises — in our global food system, our emergency feeding network, our family meals — are connected. Yet there are also many initiatives springing up to restore the local and global food systems around fresh, nutritious food in all its beauty and diversity — farmers' markets and green markets, community gardens, community supported agriculture, gardening, seed sharing, sustainable agriculture movements around the world building the food security of people rather than corporate profit.

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**Peter Mann** is international coordinator for WHY (World Hunger Year), <pmann@igc.apc.org>.

## We raise de wheat

We raise de wheat,  
Dey gib us de corn;  
We bake de bread,  
Dey gib us de cruss;  
We sif de meal,  
Dey gib us de huss;  
We peel de meat,  
Dey gib us de skin  
And dat's de way  
Dey takes us in.

— *African-American folk secular  
from the slavery era.*



Poetry!



# Consolidated cornucopia: how corporate food is ploughing small farmers into the ground

by Christopher D. Cook

There's a tornado wreaking havoc across America's farm lands, cutting a destructive swath far wider than any global warming-propelled tropical storm. The eye of this tempest, which has put hundreds of thousands of small farmers out of business or on the poverty line, is the corporate boardroom. Here, executives grind up farms to feed voracious shareholders, and tighten their grip on an ever consolidating food chain.

It's not a conspiracy against small farmers, just monopoly capitalism at work: sprawling agri-food corporations diversifying their portfolios, specializing their holdings, and expanding their empires of ownership and control. A decade of merger mania has resulted in what the USDA calls an "historically high" concentration of ownership throughout agriculture. And global food firms are weaving ever more seamless webs of vertical integration, "from seedlings to supermarkets," as agribusiness expert Al Krebs puts it. Meanwhile tens of thousands of small farms and ranches are being plowed under each year (half a million over the past 15 years), turning rural communities into ghost towns.

Family farms are still a mainstay throughout much of rural America, but their future is bleak and many are already teetering on the precipice of poverty. Farm income is so tenuous that, according to Krebs, if growers relied entirely on farm

earnings, "over 80 percent of the farmers in this country would be below the poverty line." An estimated 50,000 farms go belly-up each year due to bankruptcy.

Those farmers who are sticking it out are getting pummeled by a hailstorm of distressing data. Pork and wheat prices are so low that farmers are taking massive losses and racking up more debt. According to the Farmers Home Administration, farmers' bad debt shot up 20 percent in just one quarter of 1998. Farm debt has risen for six straight years, according to the USDA, and is now at its highest level since 1985. A recent Federal Reserve Bank study shows a new drought in farm credit is setting in. The Bank expected total farm income to plummet 15 percent by the end of last year.

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Everything taken together, "it is a farm crisis of 1980s proportions," says John Crabtree, of the Center for Rural Affairs based in Walt Hill, Nebraska.

The main reason for today's farm crisis is plummeting prices—not for food, but for crops. Since 1980, farmers' share of consumer spending on food has shriveled from 37 cents per consumer dollar to 23 cents,

according to the 1998 USDA National Commission on Small Farms.

Mark Ritchie, director of the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, has seen the crop data and heard farmers' laments: "Prices are so low that in some states around 20 percent of the farmers won't get financing next year to farm. The price they are receiving is below the cost of production, and so nothing can be done. Farmers use terms like the coming Holocaust in the countryside."

The price plunge is especially evident in livestock and grains, sectors experiencing rapid consolidation. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, hog prices took a severe nosedive in 1997-1998, falling by 35 percent to their lowest in 27 years; meanwhile soybeans were selling for 24 percent less, wheat prices shrunk 21 percent, and corn by 16 percent. Wheat farmers are losing almost \$2 per bushel: While it costs more than \$5 to produce a bushel of wheat, farmers are getting under \$3. Says Krebs: "The only thing left to do is borrow."

This flurry of price troubles coincided with sharp declines in government farm supports, as the 1995 farm bill's phase-out of subsidies kicked in; the USDA projected a 17 percent drop in government payments to farmers in 1998. As their production rose, farmers' net income was expected to shrink by 8 percent. Amid election season, Congress rushed \$6 billion to farmers. But, in keeping with farm-subsidy tradition, the bulk of the cash went to "the big guys" who produced the most, says Crabtree. "The people driving that decision don't have a concern about whether we have family farmers raising our grain or whether we have corporations doing it."

## **"Policy choices" aid consolidation**

Much of the current farm crisis can be traced to government policy and the machinations of the marketplace. Agricultural corporations are simultaneously buying out their competitors and pricing out farmers.

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**Christopher D. Cook** is a freelance investigative journalist based in San Francisco, <cdcook@igc.apc.org>.

While small farms (those with under \$250,000 in sales) comprise 94 percent of the nation's farms, they take in just 41 percent of all farm revenue. The USDA's 1998 commission on small farms found that "ownership and control over agricultural assets is increasingly concentrated." As a result, "farmers have little to no control over setting the price for their products."

Nowhere is this trend more dramatic than in meat packing, where a 1996 USDA commission on consolidation found that four firms "account for over 80 percent of all cattle slaughtered," while just three firms control 70-75 percent of the lamb market. Monopolistic conditions throughout agriculture, the commission

said, are due in large part to "the merger movement of the past decade."

While the consolidation commission touted production and consumer price "efficiencies" supposedly gained through concentration, its 1996 report also made clear that independent producers are getting priced out of business. The agency found a "depression of producer prices at all levels," and concluded that cattle ranchers' "losses seem out of control and hard to justify in light of the record profits being recorded at the higher levels of the beef industry." Farmer testimonies also revealed that increased concentration leads directly to lower producer prices.

Another USDA finding was particularly ominous: While concentration is pushing producer prices down, it is also encour-

aging a type of race to the top among farm lending agencies, which, given the price pinching, are reluctant to finance small farms. "Farmers who have made decent livings and survived the 1980s farm credit crisis are now refused operating loans unless they agreed to expand," the report said. "For these farmers, the price for survival is taking on excessive debt and expanding to factory farm size.

"By granting credit only to large-scale operations on the basis that such operations are the future, these lenders will create a self-fulfilling prophecy," the USDA deduced. "The only operation that will survive will be big operations, not necessarily because of increased efficiency, but because of their access to capital."

But the USDA, by its own

acknowledgement, has expanded these inequities. The agency has, according to its 1998 small farms commission, made "policy choices" that have "perpetuated the structural bias toward greater concentration of assets and wealth in fewer and larger farms and fewer and larger agribusiness firms. Federal farm programs have historically benefited large farms the most. Tax policies give large farmers greater incentives for capital purchases to expand their operations," the commission said.

#### **Diet for a corporate planet**

Hard times on the farm come amid—and in many ways result from—heavy days for the largest agribusiness corporations engaged in a financial feeding frenzy of mergers and acquisitions. In the biggest recent buyout, Cargill (the nation's largest pri-



*Still Life* by William Heda, 1637

Louvre, Paris

vately held company) snatched up Continental Grain Company's (in the top five among private U.S. grain traders) grain storage, transportation, export and trading operations in North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia. Assuming it passes antitrust muster, the purchase, estimated to be worth between \$300 million and \$1 billion, will give Cargill control over one-third of all U.S. grain exports.

Cargill celebrated the consolidation, promoting it as a boon for farmers. "Together these grain operations will expand farmers' reach into new markets," said Cargill CEO and chairman Ernest S. Micek. "Continental's worldwide grain handling and export facilities will help us move farmers' crops to our processing plants and to our customers more reliably and efficiently."

Even if Cargill's happy projections prove accurate, farmers and agribusiness critics say industry consolidation will choke off any increased cash flow. Exports may expand markets for farmers, but as Food First's Peter Rosset explains, "the bonanza isn't shared with farmers; it's pretty much sucked up by the intermediaries." Krebs puts it even more bluntly: "Farmers don't trade grain, grain traders trade grain."

In fact, Cargill's consolidation could take a big bite out of grain farmer earnings. "It's going to greatly diminish the number of markets that farmers can sell into," says Crabtree, putting grain growers "more at the mercy of Cargill now."

Farmers expect the consolidation will only worsen their recent losses. Before the buyout, Illinois corn grower Floyd Schultz could sell his crops to Cargill or Continental Grains, he told *The New York Times*. Now, he will have to drive an extra 30 miles—costing him an extra 10 cents a bushel—to bargain with the nearest competitor, Archer Daniels Midland. Mike Yost, a Minnesota corn and soybean grower, predicts the Cargill deal will cost him about \$2,700 a year in diminished crop value.

"We see constant consolidation of both our input suppliers for seed, fertilizer, pesticides and the people who purchase our production," Yost told the *Times*. "Obviously, the trend's not healthy for the American farmer."

In response, several senators and numerous farm advocacy groups are challenging Cargill's acquisition, and calling for the Justice Department to investigate possible antitrust violations.

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*An astounding portion of the world's food production and supply is controlled by a tiny handful of corporations. Just two companies, Cargill and ADM (a.k.a. "supermarket to the world"), control 75 to 80 percent of the world's grain production.*

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### Food empires

Cargill's mammoth acquisition is just the tip of the merger-mania iceberg. While Continental is ending its century-old grain business, it will use Cargill's cash to further consolidate its livestock holding; earlier in 1998 Continental moved to gobble up Premium Standard Farms, a hog-raising and processing giant. This past June, Monsanto bought up Cargill's international seed operations in Central and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa for \$1.4 billion—cash that undoubtedly helped Cargill snag Continental Grain.

As holdings and money change hands, these firms expand and deepen their specialized niches and control over market sectors and distribution channels—making concentrations of ownership and control more and more seamless. When Tyson Foods bought up Hudson Foods for \$651.6 million in 1997, one analyst called the

merger "a strategic fit that should increase Tyson's dominance of the poultry industry"—enabling Tyson to control nearly 30 percent of the U.S. poultry industry.

An astounding portion of the world's food production and supply is controlled by a tiny handful of corporations. Just two companies, Cargill and ADM (a.k.a. "supermarket to the world"), control 75 to 80 percent of the world's grain production, according to Krebs, author of *The Corporate Reapers*. "Nearly every product on the market today that has corn in it (such as lysine, citric acids, and sweeteners) comes from ADM," says Krebs. Meanwhile 70 percent of the world's highly lucrative cereal market is controlled by four firms (Kelloggs, Philip Morris, General Mills, and Quaker Oats).

These global food firms are stunningly vast. Cargill, a commodities kingmaker with annual sales of \$67 billion, owns 29 subsidiaries spanning the manufacture, financing, wholesale and transportation of dozens of food crops, livestock, and commodity futures. Its scope captures nearly every aspect of food production, including seeds, fertilizer, feed grain, cattle feed lots, and contract hog production.

### Own globally, control locally

The undisputed master of vertical integration is ConAgra (\$24 billion in annual sales). To leaf through the glossy pages of ConAgra's annual report is to take a tour, both up and down a tightly knit food chain and across the borders of nearly every continent on the globe. As the firm boasted to its shareholders, "diversification across the food chain provides limitless opportunities for growth."

Crisp, high-definition photographs illustrate how ConAgra's cornucopia spans the food production continuum. At the bottom of ConAgra's food chain are the essential inputs, such as "crop protection chemicals," fertilizer and seed distribution. Then there's marketing infrastructure, "worldwide commodity distribution



and merchandising,” and commodity services. The company then skips the dirty business of grain growing and leapfrogs to value-added areas such as barley malting, flour milling and the manufacture of seasonings and “spray-dried food ingredients.”

The next several slick pages march through a parade of ConAgra’s brand-name products — 21 of which “chalk up annual retail sales of more than \$100 million.” The ConAgra supermarket includes “Healthy Choice” and other gourmet frozen foods, Hunt’s products, Hebrew National Beef Franks, Van Camps baked beans, and Butterball turkey products.

Each of ConAgra’s three major divisions (food inputs and ingredients, refrigerated foods, and grocery products) owns dozens of major brand-names, and many of these holdings in turn own numerous product lines. Curiously, ConAgra’s tremendous expanse exposes the company to — but may also protect it from — the countervailing winds of prices along the food chain. For example, ConAgra’s poultry and turkey operations took a hit in 1997 due to high feed grain prices; but ConAgra itself is heavily involved in the domestic and international grain business.

ConAgra’s “diversification” spreads not only across the food chain, but around the world. It sells and markets meat in Korea, Taiwan, China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Puerto Rico, Australia and Japan; the company peddles pesticides and fertilizers to customers such as South Africa, Bulgaria, Chile, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Singapore; it also distributes prepared foods in the Philippines.

ConAgra’s vertical integration and horizon-less holdings pack a mighty punch when it comes to controlling independent producers. Just as Cargill may soon monopolize grain elevators throughout the Midwest and eliminate growers’ negotiating power, so does ConAgra wield near-total control over regional poultry production. ConAgra and other integrated meat-

processing corporations, such as Perdue and IBP, accomplish this through “contract farming,” a growing trend which is turning more and more small producers into little more than tenant farmers.

“If you sign a contract with Perdue or IBP,” says Food First’s Rosset, “every detail of the production process is spelled out: You must construct the animal housing according to their plans, wire the buildings according to their plans, feed the ani-



mals exactly their feed, use exactly the antibiotics they recommend. And they have visits by contract supervisors to make sure that the farmer goes along with it.”

While the corporation supplies the baby animals (which remain company property) and the inputs, the farmer shoulders the risk if the animals die off and the corporation determines that the farmer mismanaged its property. Factory farming increases this risk by exposing tens of thousands of animals to bacterial diseases, such as the increasingly common e-coli outbreaks. But, says Rosset, “if the animals die off, the farmer goes out of business, not IBP or Perdue.”

Perdue’s poultry producer agreement requires contract farmers to provide and maintain all necessary housing, equipment, roads and utilities, and labor, and to use company-supplied feed, medications and vaccinations. The farmer, who is referred to as an independent contractor, must own the land, buildings and equipment — but Perdue may enter and inspect the premises at any time. And if Perdue decides that farmer is not following the company’s “established procedures” for raising the flock, the firm can require the producer to pay for necessary adjustments.

Perhaps more onerous are the highly

consolidated conditions under which farmers must sign these agreements. “In reality, we don’t really have independent producers in poultry,” says the Center for Rural Affairs’ Crabtree. “There isn’t a chicken market, everybody is vertically integrated.” In this context, “it’s not the contracting of production that is so troublesome, it is the fact that producers today have to contract with an industry that is so concentrated and consolidated that there is no way they can sit at a table and have any comparable economic power to be able to negotiate an agreement that is fair.”

Broad socio-economic trends, such as the rise of two-worker households and the demise of the home-cooked meal, have changed the way food is consumed and produced — largely to the detriment of farmers. As fast food and frozen meals become increasingly popular, farmers’ crops represent an ever-smaller fraction of the final product.

Krebs describes how Total cereal added just a few cents’ worth of nutrients to Wheaties, yet the product now costs 50 cents more. “The farmer doesn’t see any of that profit. When you look at how much of what the farmer actually produces is in the final product, it is minuscule.”

The USDA Commission on Small Farms came to a similar conclusion, noting the widening gap both between farm crops and table food, and between farm income and food value. “As farmers focused on producing undifferentiated raw commodities, food system profit and opportunities were shifted to the companies that process, package, and market food,” the commission explained. “Consequently, from 1910 to 1990 the share of the agricultural economy received by farmers dropped from 21 to 5 percent.”

In today’s de-coupled food chain, says Krebs, “most farmers are becoming producers of raw materials for a giant food manufacturing system. They are really not in any sense producing food anymore.” **TV**

# The community food security movement

by Laura M. McCullough

**D**uring the great Irish potato famine, food exports from Ireland never waned; some experts predict that in a few short years Americans are likely to face a similar situation. While food exports will skyrocket to satisfy global demands, food costs for most Americans will increase dramatically.

Twice in this century, Americans have dealt with major food crises. The results were community gardening movements: the Liberty Gardens and the Victory Gardens of the two World Wars. Today, the Community Food Security (CFS) movement is an effort by thinkers, researchers, community activists, farmers, environmentalists, community development advocates and others across sectors and disciplines to move toward sustainable, regional food systems. While the anti-hunger sector has always been about food security — for individuals and families — Community Food Security is broader.

Formed in 1994, the national Community Food Security Coalition intends to bring about a situation “in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable diet at all times through local non-emergency sources.” The Coalition, with offices in Venice, Calif., has left this definition purposefully simple. While addressing the key issues, it leaves room for who will be involved and how the goal

will be achieved.

Last October, the Coalition held its second annual meeting in Pittsburgh, Pa. Among the 130 participants were organic farmers, community food bank directors, cooperative extension agents, horticultural groups, economic development experts, community-based organizations, world hunger activists, academicians, social service providers, urban agriculturists, spiritual/religious leaders as well as representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a representative from the Secretary of Agriculture.

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*Although some communities appear to be more at-risk than others, when it comes to a secure, sustainable source of good food, the CFS organizing principle is that, “Hey, we all gotta eat.”*

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At one lunch table, an organic vegetable producer from Florida, a Canadian social worker, a Tufts University professor, a representative of the Heifer Project, a community development expert and a director of a Catholic rural social services group discussed the relative merits of urban farmers’ markets. The conversation at the next table concerned the loss of small farms, farm families, and the cultural and community deficits these losses continue to create.

Regardless of topic or affiliation, there was a commonality: the notion of food as a

“green stage” on which to build community and from which to address broad social justice and economic issues. All saw the need to create linkages between low-income communities and regional food producers — and the importance of creating multi-faceted regional food systems that re-empower communities and decrease reliance on the corporate food system.

Although some communities appear to be more at-risk than others, when it comes to a secure, sustainable source of good food, the CFS organizing principle is that, “Hey, we all gotta eat.” While the anti-hunger sector has understandable qualms about allocating resources to the long-term work of food systems planning while people are starving, Andy Fisher, Executive Director of the CFS Coalition, points out that “the two movements share the similar goal of a nation without poverty.”

Thanks to the effort of the Coalition, the USDA funds an annual grant program (\$2.4 million in 1998) to help communities and cross-sector collaborations develop sustainable, comprehensive, long-term strategies to address nutrition and health, farm and food producer, and local food systems issues. Through this program the Upper Sand Mountain United Methodist Church Larger Parish in Alabama, for example, is training rural low-income families and youth in micro-enterprise in the Sowing Seeds and Stocking Shelves Program. Likewise, the Maine Coalition for Food Security is creating food-system study circles and food policy councils and is organizing a statewide food security conference. And the Tahoma Food System in Washington, in collaboration with the cooperative extension, is working to provide square-foot nutrition, a combination nutrition education/gardening program to at-risk youth, while also working on land use planning and farming issues.

The CFS movement has adopted an asset-analysis approach to problem solving and coalition building, as opposed to

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the victim-based paradigm of a governmental or social service agency identifying a community and problem(s) and attempting to fix perceived wrongs. An asset-analysis is non-victim oriented. It assumes undeveloped and untapped potential already exists within any group and that the place to start is to determine with the community the nature of its assets, while thereby exposing where lapses in food security exist. The ultimate responsibility for shor-

ing up the community's assets belongs to the community itself.

This approach is a radical shift in worldview for many social service and governmental organizations and some find it ideologically threatening. In the face of dwindling funding, some would prefer to see the *status quo* of anti-hunger organizations and service provision industries remain the way it is. But the CFS movement is predicated on the belief that an approach

which cuts across communities is needed so that the question of meeting the need for food is not focused solely on the needs of a disempowered constituency.

Certainly, this notion extends way beyond food. But, as a "green stage" it is a place we all have to go, since "we all gotta eat." If we can embrace it, one locale at a time, the CFS hope is that we will begin to address the sustainability and security of the globe at large. **TW**

## CFS and anti-hunger advocacy

by Mike Hamm

There has been considerable tension between the Community Food Security (CFS) movement and anti-hunger advocates the last several years that I believe is inherently unproductive. Much of the language of the CFS movement is oriented toward the future. It incorporates a broad range of issues ranging from farmland preservation to land access for community gardens, from food production sustainability to community food access. Types of projects and system processes advocated by CFS activists to date are such that immediate food benefits, if existing, will be limited to a relatively small number of people. Undoubtedly, if implemented on a broad scale and incorporated as policy at local, regional and national levels they would have broad impact.

In contrast, much of the activity of anti-hunger advocates is oriented towards NOW. There is an understanding of immediate need for food by a broad swath of our population and the goal is to assure programs and food to meet those needs, from whatever sources are immediately available.

The work of anti-hunger advocates

often spans a broad range of issues not entirely overlapping with CFS aims. These include the full range of poverty issues — from housing to education, from jobs to health care. While CFS touches on some of these, they are generally peripheral to the movement's core interests.

We typically define food security in terms of people (or communities) having access to an adequate, nutritious, safe, and culturally acceptable food supply on a daily basis through non-emergency sources. We typically interpret this as meaning that you either are or are not food secure. We also typically interpret it as individuals and families being self-sufficient and not needing food stamps, food pantries or soup kitchens. In reality, most people have different degrees of food security.

I believe the focus should be more on a person, family or community's movement toward self-sufficiency inside a continuum that runs from zero food security (frank malnutrition and lack of food access) to full food security. Full food security, within the framework of the CFS movement, encompasses a broad array of issues. It is not simply the ability of a person to get whatever food they want, whenever they want it. It includes a range of areas encompass-

ing the viability of the farms where the food is grown, ecological sustainability of its production, source of food (e.g., global vs. local), and control of production and distribution.

Thus, full community food security encompasses a range of issues beyond access and availability. Within this continuum, there is a tremendous amount of room for movement. For example, those who are unemployed become, hopefully, more food secure when they gain employment and increased money.

This can lead us to realize that there are more fundamental similarities than fundamental differences in what food security and anti-hunger advocates are trying to accomplish in their work: that is, to make sure people have sufficient food in a manner that ensures future generations also have sufficient food. If we understand that both are needed — an orientation towards now and an orientation towards the future — then we can understand that anti-hunger work and food security work are oriented towards helping move people along the continuum toward achieving food security. We can realize that our common goal is the elimination of need for emergency feeding infrastructures, romantic as that goal may be.

— Mike Hamm is director of the Urban Ecology Program at Rutgers University.



# Community food security in practice

## “Pawpaw guy” revives interest in age-old fruit

by Michelle Gorman

Autumn in Athens County, Ohio, is a sight to behold. By mid-October, the lush deciduous trees of these Appalachian foothills turn into an arresting palette of gold, scarlet, orange and burgundy. And thanks to Chris Chmiel, one tree in particular is quickly gaining recognition in southeastern Ohio — the pawpaw.

*Asimina triloba*, commonly known as the pawpaw, produces North America’s largest native edible tree fruit. This creamy, fleshy fruit, with aliases like “the poor man’s banana” and musical tributes like “Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch,” is indigenous to the temperate woodlands of the eastern U.S. It grows wild in 25 states east of the Mississippi River.

It’s also plentiful in the hills of Albany, Ohio, where Chmiel, 28, lives with his family on an 18-acre homestead dubbed Integration Acres. Chmiel recalls hiking through his woods and marveling at the abundance of pawpaws dangling from the trees. He’s passionate about the pawpaw as well as the resurgence of native and wild foods into the American diet.

“I said to myself — why aren’t more people eating these?” Chmiel recounted.

Pawpaws are soft and delicate, bruise easily and have a short shelf life. They are typically eaten immediately after picking, and are only ripe and on the tree from mid-September to mid-October (in Ohio).

Around the same time, Chmiel was working as a researcher for Understory, Inc. The agency had received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to conduct an economic feasibility study of non-timber forest products. Included



Michelle Gorman

in the research were traditional forest products like mushrooms, ginseng and goldenseal, as well as more exotic ones like pawpaw.

While working in the field for the grant, Chmiel harvested many a pawpaw. He mashed and froze several gallons of the fruit and a light bulb went off. He propositioned the worker-owned Casa Nueva Restaurant and Cantina in the nearby college town of Athens to host a sort of “pawpaw appreciation reception.” He provided the frozen fruit, area chefs crafted pawpaw delicacies and “Pawpaw Night” was born. Patrons sipped pawpaw coladas, sampled pawpaw cream pie and cheesecake and feasted on vegetables with pawpaw curry.

“This was exciting for people — it was a ‘new’ plant for people to appreciate. It

was also one of the bar’s highest-grossing Tuesday nights,” Chmiel remarked with a grin.

In the fall of 1997, with no food processing experience and little capital, but with immeasurable enthusiasm and a volunteer army of friends, Chmiel undertook the next phase. He posted signs and placed ads across the county, all with the same message — “Will pay for pawpaws.” Folks read the signs, and a small legion of faithful pawpaw pickers took to the hills. He purchased bushel after bushel of fresh fruit from the pickers and then processed the mashed fruits into “frozen pulp in pyramidal shapes.” He successfully processed and froze one ton of pawpaws into a transportable commercial product available year-round — Pawpaw Pleasures.

Casa Nueva used the frozen pawpaw pulp in menu items like pawpaw coladas and pawpawneros salsa. Over time other culinary delights emerged, including pawpaw ice cream and the pawpaw lassi. A local bagel shop created a pawpaw cream cheese as a sandwich spread, and a bakery offered pawpaw scones.

The following summer Chmiel provided Pawpaw Pleasures to Wild Oats, a natural grocery store chain with a location in Columbus, Ohio. The juice bar there created a refreshing, protein-packed smoothie using the pawpaw pulp. And in the fall, Wild Oats purchased fresh fruit from Chmiel, making pawpaws accessible to the urban shopper. Chmiel also sold freshly plucked Ohio-grown pawpaws to a specialty foods distributor with locations across the U.S.

So in the fall of 1998, with a year of experience under his belt, Chmiel welcomed the ripening of his beloved pawpaw. His dedicated pickers re-emerged for another season, and the pulping and

freezing commenced again.

"One guy picked 1,500 pounds this year. He canoed on the Hocking River and rigged up his mountain bike with pails to collect pawpaws. He consistently made over \$10 an hour. Some days he made over \$20 an hour," Chmiel said.

In the height of the season, Chmiel received an e-mail from a chef at the Seelbach Hotel in Louisville, Ky. He was developing a regional cuisine menu for the hotel's four-star restaurant and needed 20 pounds of frozen pawpaw pulp immediately. Chmiel delivered.

"Working with the Seelbach gave some respect, some validity, to my whole product. I'm proud of that. Working with a restaurant of that caliber was really a

thrill."

The pawpaw has also fostered community development in Chmiel's hometown. As a member of his local village's economic development committee, Chmiel convinced the city council to debut the Albany Pawpaw Festival next fall, making it Ohio's premier pawpaw event. The village of Albany also named the pawpaw as its official town tree. Enthusiasm spread to the local police department too — the chief authorized the addition of the pawpaw tree to its police logo. Pawpaw plantings along city streets are scheduled for next spring.

With nearly 1,000 pounds of pulp left in the freezer and new accounts cropping up daily, Chmiel is prepared for the

pawpaw's rising popularity. He has also sold hundreds of pounds of pawpaw seeds to nurseries, with the hope that the tree will become commonplace again in the American landscape.

"To me what's really satisfying is giving someone my product and having them say 'This tastes great — where can I get some more?'" Chmiel said. "This is the fruit of the next century. It's the next kiwi."

Chmiel's next foray into forest food? "Spicebush marinade," he confirms with gusto.

—Michelle Gorman lives in Albany, Ohio. For more information on Pawpaw Pleasures, e-mail Chmiel at <cchmiel@hotmail.com> or call 740-698-2124.

## From the ground up: saving the black farmer

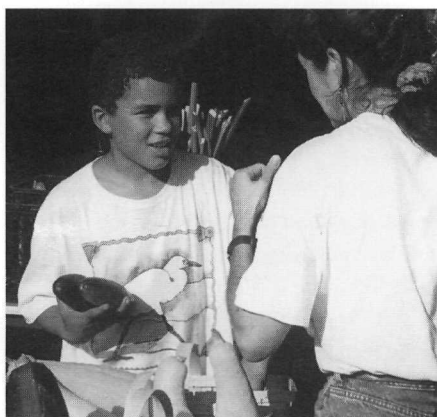
by David Hacker

In 1910, black America owned over 15 million acres of land. Black ownership today is less than 2.3 million acres.

In May 1998, a thousand people from around the country gathered in Detroit for the National Black Farmers Conference "From the Ground Up! Saving the Black Farmer." The conference, hosted by congressional representatives John Conyers and Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, was designed to raise awareness of the plight of black farmers, to build momentum for a class action lawsuit alleging discrimination in USDA lending practices against black farmers, and to develop new economic models that could reverse the trend of black land loss and insure a viable future for black farmers.

Now, after years of waiting, at three meetings in Arkansas, Alabama and North Carolina this past November hundreds of farmers were briefed on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) offer to settle the class action lawsuit. The USDA admitted systematic discrimination

THE WITNESS



Youth marketer sells locally grown produce at a neighborhood market in Detroit.

against black farmers. Their settlement offer included debt reduction and cash payments of \$50,000 per farmer. The class action suit, which began with an original 350 black farmers, now numbers over 1,000 and a federal judge ruled that it can expand to others who have experienced discrimination. Lawyers are estimating that number to be as high as 10,000.

"Is it enough?" asked Willie Head, Jr.,

a farmer who attended the briefing in Durham, N.C. "No, it's not enough for the suffering we have endured for years. Not enough to replace the legacy that has been destroyed for the oncoming black generation." Although the farmers at the meeting were divided, "you have to take what you can get," Head continued. "'In God We Trust' it says on the back of those bills. The government ought to be much truer, honorable."

Many black farmers farm on small acreages with limited resources and little access to credit or government programs that can subsidize needed improvements. "Good old boy" networks of larger farms and agency officials work against their entering effectively into the mainstream American food system. When the weather is bad, like this past summer's two-month dry spell, it means an irrigation pond runs dry while the larger white farmers run their government-subsidized deep wells. At the local produce auction, brokers work together to fix prices, often buying produce for half of what the small farmer could get from national distributors if they had the capability to sell directly. Head is a third-generation farmer who

recently inherited the family farm after his father died. But he also inherited his father's debt. "We're just hanging on," Head says, "that's about all we're doing, hanging on."

With the help of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Head and 29 other farmers with a total of 1,200 acres between them have formed the South Georgia Vegetable Growers Cooperative and are now selling to farmers' markets in Atlanta and to buyers from New York and New Orleans. Together they hope to be able to operate their own packing shed with a loading dock to accommodate semi-trailers. Many members are also getting assistance in transitioning from conventional agricultural practices to organic.

Across the country, collaboratives with land grant universities, black-owned manufacturing companies, community organizations and government are helping to build the capacity of black farmers to develop alternative marketing strate-

gies. Spearheaded by John Conyers' office, the Cassopolis Black Farmers' Marketing Project is working with eight farmers in Southwest Michigan with about 600 acres among them to develop specialty niche markets, high-value fresh produce and value-added products. The New Florida Coop is selling fresh and processed vegetables directly to school districts, learning as they go the structure of cooperatives and the dietary guidelines of school food service programs.

Last summer, bins of watermelons were for sale at a local gas station in Detroit with signs saying "Save the Black Farmer," as one individual took to the road in his own tractor trailer and brought back produce from Georgia. The Gardening Angels, a group of seniors in the Detroit Agriculture Network who grow food on vacant lots, tell their own family stories of land lost and stolen. The Detroit Farmers' Cooperative, a project of seven market gardens in the Detroit Ag-

riculture Network, employed youth marketers this summer who learned to grow and market their own food. Some of these urban youth will be the seeds of a next generation of black involvement in agriculture.

DeWayne Boyd of the National Black Farmers Association, an organizer of the May conference, sees tremendous potential in new relationships being formed on a national level between the USDA and organizations like the Arkansas Land and Financial Development Corporation and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, for the purpose of working with the many individual and community-based efforts now laying the groundwork for developing a sustainable system to market produce from black farmers.

—David Hacker is Urban Agriculture Coordinator for the Hunger Action Coalition of Michigan and coordinator of the Detroit Agriculture Network, which aims to cultivate urban land for agriculture.

## Tohono O'odham community food system

by Tohono O'odham Community Action

The Tohono O'odham and their ancestors have lived in the Sonora Desert for approximately 10,000 years. The Tohono O'odham Nation encompasses 4,600 square miles in southern Arizona.

Extreme damage to the traditional Tohono O'odham food system has had dire consequences, including destruction of economic self-sufficiency, the threatened loss of key elements of the O'odham Himdag (Desert People's Way), and extremely high rates of nutrition-related disease.

The O'odham traditionally combined dry-land farming, the collection of wild desert foods and small amounts of hunting to provide food for their families and communities. These strategies served the O'odham well until relatively recently. The O'odham still used traditional meth-

ods to cultivate more than 20,000 acres using dry-land methods as late as the 1920s. By 1949 that number had declined to 2,500 acres. Today that number is certainly less than 100, perhaps not more than 10. At the same time, the once common practice of collecting and storing wild foods declined in an equally dramatic way. Despite these declines in the traditional food system, there are still members of the community who remember when the O'odham were entirely food self-sufficient.

Virtually all elements of traditional culture — ceremonies, stories, songs, the language — are directly rooted in the system of food production. O'odham culture is truly an agri/culture. For example, the saguaro harvest and the wine ceremony served as the cornerstone of

O'odham life for centuries, calling forth the monsoon rains that make agriculture possible in the arid desert environment. Today, only a small portion of the O'odham community participates in this sacred rite. The ceremony is in danger of being lost precisely because it no longer has any connection to the material reality of people's lives. When food comes in cans from the grocery store or in sacks from USDA commodity distribution programs, it no longer really matters to most people whether or not the rains come. In such circumstances, there is no longer a compelling reason for a key element of Tohono O'odham culture to continue.

For centuries, traditional desert foods — and the effort it took to produce them — kept the Tohono O'odham healthy. Over thousands of years, the Tohono O'odham metabolism had become especially well adapted to the foods of the Sonora Desert. The intro-



duction of processed foods, however, changed all of that. The new foods were metabolized by the body in a much less efficient manner, leading to a previously unexperienced disease among the Tohono O'odham: adult-onset diabetes. As recently as the early 1960s, diabetes was unknown among the Tohono O'odham. Today, more than 50 percent of the population develops the disease, the highest rate in the world. The disease has even begun to appear in children as young as seven. Several scientific studies have confirmed that traditional O'odham foods — such as tepary beans, mesquite beans, cholla (cactus) buds and chia seeds — help regulate blood sugar and significantly reduce both the incidence and the effects of diabetes. In a very real sense, the destruction of the traditional food system is killing the Tohono O'odham.

A project of Tohono O'odham Com-

munity Action (TOCA), the Tohono O'odham community food system program nurtures the creation of a food system in which economic/food system development takes place on three different levels. First and most impor-



*Winter vegetables by Mary Azarian*

tantly, families and communities are provided with the resources they need in order to grow and collect traditional foods for their own consumption, encouraging and expanding the possibility

for self-sufficiency. Second, the program creates opportunities for people to engage in micro-enterprise projects by marketing their surplus O'odham foods to local institutions where they are served to other community members. Third, after all local need has been met, additional micro-enterprise opportunities are developed by marketing to surrounding communities.

Through the establishment of community gardens, redevelopment of traditional flood-based farming, creation of partnerships with schools and other institutions and implementation of a desert foods collecting program, the program is a comprehensive response to the near total destruction of the traditional Tohono O'odham food system.

*TOCA may be reached at <synread@earthlink.net>. Artist Mary Azarian's work can be obtained from Farmhouse Press, RD2, Box 831, Plainfield, VT 95667.*

## San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners

The San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) was founded in 1983 because its founders felt a pressing need to support those interested in urban greening, neighborhood beautification and local food production in San Francisco, the nation's third most densely populated city. SLUG is now an organization with 24 full-time staff with an annual budget of over \$3 million.

Through raising an awareness of social justice, community development and ecological sustainability, SLUG strives to connect San Francisco residents to the power gardening has to transform individuals and communities. Currently, the organization supports and coordinates more than 100 community gardens, including gardens in schools, hospices and women's shelters; teaches gardening, land

stewardship and community outreach to 6,000 youth and adults annually; and provides services to more than 2,000 members and gardeners city-wide. SLUG has launched a new Welfare to Work program, tackled restoration projects and expanded outreach to local communities.

SLUG provides job training to low-income people, particularly in southeast San Francisco, as crews learn the skills required for jobs in carpentry, landscaping, native plant restoration, horticulture and organic gardening. Projects range from creek restoration to regular maintenance in each of San Francisco's 42 public community gardens.

An important source of employment for the SLUG crews is an ongoing partnership with the Caritas Management Corporation. Caritas hires SLUG to land-

scape and maintain the grounds of six housing developments throughout the city, where the crews learn to use organic gardening techniques. This is rare in commercial landscaping, an industry traditionally dependent upon chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Every Saturday the SLUG maintenance crew visits a community garden in San Francisco. The crew works with the gardeners to revitalize and reconstruct the space, ensuring the safety and manageability of the garden. In addition, SLUG educators teach organic gardening and composting workshops at the gardens on a regular basis.

The St. Mary's Urban Youth Farm has become a model for urban agriculture and youth employment. The Farm is known both as a location for job training and opportunity and as a source of fresh organic produce for the community.

Working at the St. Mary's Farm the summer of 1998, over 80 SLUG teens built a pond, restored native habitats, grew vegetables and cared for fruit trees. The youth interns assigned to the Farm's crop areas learned techniques to maximize food production under the guidance of Urban Agriculture Coordinator Kathi Colen. A former instructor at University of California at Santa Cruz's Farm and Garden Apprenticeship program, Colen introduced new plant species to the teens, from purple potatoes to companion plants which attract beneficial insects.

In addition to tending crops, the SLUG crew broke ground on a bee deck, which will house several hives of bees provided by the San Francisco Beekeepers Association. Once the hives are up and humming, the teens will learn to care for the bees and harvest the honey, which will be processed and packaged for sale through Urban Herbals, SLUG's youth enterprise program. The teens are also growing tarragon, jalapeños and garlic, all earmarked for Urban Herbals vinegar and salsa production.

Kevin Robinson, President of the Alemany Resident Management Corpo-

ration, attributes his start in community activism to the time he spent working in the Youth Garden Internship Program. "I think SLUG uses gardening as a tool to do some things that no other organization



*Garden shed by Mary Azarian*

has done," he says. "It is really hard to bring youth from different backgrounds together, but I have seen a lot of kids whose lives have been affected dramatically, positively, by just going through [SLUG's youth programs]. Doing this type of work crosses culture, class and all of those boundaries."

As welfare policy in the U.S. changes, so is SLUG's role in San Francisco. In partnership with other local non-profit and for-profit companies, SLUG has de-

signed the Southeast Job Training Collaborative. This is a comprehensive program designed to assist in the transition from welfare to full-time, living-wage employment. SLUG is working with agencies including Young Community Developers, the San Francisco Shipyards Training Center and HMR Global Recyclers to offer a complete path, from welfare to work, through which participants will be prepared, trained and placed into a new career with the skills and retention support they need to succeed.

SLUG is already intimately connected with the low-income communities and public housing developments of southeast San Francisco, the area which will be hardest hit by the welfare changes now going into effect. SLUG has applied to the Department of Labor for funding for the Job Training Collaborative, and is hoping to honor its commitment to the local community with this program.

— from *SLUG Update*, Fall 1998

For more information on SLUG contact: <[www.slug-sf.org](http://www.slug-sf.org)>; 2088 Oakdale Ave., San Francisco, Calif. 94124; 415-285-7584. Artist Mary Azarian's work can be obtained from Farmhouse Press, RD2, Box 831, Plainfield, VT 95667.

## Just Food in New York City

by Kathy Lawrence

Just Food began in 1994 as an all-volunteer effort to promote a more holistic approach to food, farming and hunger issues. The effort grew out of the ongoing work of regional food system activists and NYC-based groups who recognized both the magnitude of the region's food system problems and the need to bring diverse groups together to build understanding and cooperation. When formally established in 1995, Just Food pledged not to duplicate the work of existing

groups. Instead, Just Food links existing resources to develop collaborative projects that preserve open space, develop community leadership, boost local food production and equitable distribution and create jobs. The vision is simple and radical: communities and individuals working together to create good food, good jobs, strong communities and a healthy environment.

Just Food's "CSA in NYC" program helps Northeast farmers and New York-

ers of all income levels build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) arrangements, city folks pay in advance for a share in a farm's upcoming harvest. This enables the farmers to receive fair and guaranteed payment for their products while CSA members receive shares of freshly-picked, organic vegetables from June to November. Since the summer of 1996, Just Food has helped six regional farmers establish CSA operations in eight neighborhoods in four boroughs. To help find ways for all New Yorkers to have access to safe,

fresh, nutritious food, Just Food is developing partnerships with low-income communities to create viable CSAs in their neighborhoods.

Just Food initiated and continues to coordinate the City Farms program, a collaborative project that works intensively with community gardens to develop a sustainable network of food-producing gardens in New York City. In its 1997 pilot season, City Farms worked with four gardens that produced and donated food to nearby food pantries. Two of the gardens also marketed a portion of their produce, totaling \$1,200 in revenues. Combined, the gardens involved 31 growers and 57 volunteers, reached over 750 food program clients and sold to over 200 shoppers at local farmers' markets.

In 1998, City Farms worked intensively with eight community gardens and offered support to over 20 additional groups — providing hands-on technical assistance in organic growing techniques; capacity building and volunteer management; food harvesting, storage and preparation; nutrition education; building community partnerships for garden preservation; and developing marketing skills.

Other Just Food programs include a two-year "participatory action research" project to support the viability of Northeastern farms and help urban ethnic food buyers gain access to high quality, fresh agricultural products from the Northeast region by linking them through marketing relationships. Just Food also sponsors an annual "Your Food Today and Tomorrow" conference, which brings together groups working on food, farming and hunger issues to learn more about local food systems and how to support a more just and sustainable food system.

Contact Just Food at: <justfood@igc.org>; 625 Broadway #9C, New York, N.Y. 10012; 212-677-1602.

## Hate websites

Christian hate websites are proliferating on the Internet, according to *Witness* contributing editor Virginia Ramey Mollencott, who passes along an October 27, 1998 viewpoint article on the topic by Mike Celizic in *The Record*, a newspaper serving Passaic County, N.J. Neal Horsley, for example, operates a site called "The Nuremberg Trials," which supplies a list of abortion providers and their photos, addresses, license plate numbers and other information sent in by informants as an aid to persons wishing to track clinic personnel down and stop them, including by violence. According to Celizic, Horsley openly applauds the killing of physicians who perform abortions at his site.

"Among the groups who join Horsley in cheering the death of doctors who perform abortions are the Ku Klux Klan and many ultra-right militia groups," Celizic writes. "Follow the links among their websites and you are soon reading about the benefits of dissolving the Union and rounding up, jailing and killing homosexuals. You will also learn about the dangers of the United Nations, secular humanism, the European Common Market and the public school system."

Mollencott, a prominent writer and spokesperson on behalf of homosexuals and others who are denied their civil rights or otherwise ostracized on account of their sexuality — and an out lesbian — notes that she is among the names mentioned on some of these web sites, "along with my phone number, address and a map of my home area. We need to pray for one another's safety and to combat the idea that targeting people falls under freedom of speech."

## 2001–2010: decade of peace and nonviolence

In an historic vote on November 10, 1998, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously voted to

proclaim the first decade of the 21st century "The Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World (2001–2010)." The call for the decade came from an appeal to the U.N. signed by 23 Nobel Peace Laureates, including Nelson Mandela, the late Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire from Belfast, Northern Ireland, organized the effort.

The proclamation invites each member state to take the necessary steps to teach the principles of nonviolence at every level of society. U.N. bodies, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, religious leaders, the media, performing artists and civil societies are called upon to support the decade for the benefit of the children of the world.

— Fellowship of Reconciliation,  
<fellowship@igc.apc.org>

## Eco-Church

"Eco-Church" is a project of the North American Coalition for Christianity and Ecology (NACCE) aimed at promoting small ecumenical groups of Christians devoted to environmental activism. The new church groups are not intended to compete with existing churches, but "may well attract those who have left the traditional churches in search of a more Earthcentered Christian spirituality."

An adult study curriculum is aimed at Earth literacy and Christian theology. "Children, in addition to learning the story of Jesus, will learn to love the natural world as God's sacred creation in which we humans have a special role."

— *Weaving the Connections*,  
Center for Women, the Earth, the  
Divine, Autumn 1998

*Short takes*



# Organizing farmworkers

by Farm Labor Organizing Committee

**T**he Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) was founded in 1967 by Baldemar Velasquez, and in 1979 was formally organized as a labor union of farmworkers working in the Midwest. After unsuccessful attempts to establish a dialogue with Campbell Soup Company, FLOC workers voted in 1978 to strike all Campbell's tomato field operations in northwestern Ohio. When strikebreakers were brought in and the corporation mandated that its growers use mechanical harvesters, FLOC called upon public support in the form of a citizens' boycott of all Campbell Soup products.

In February 1986, after two years of on-and-off talks, FLOC, Campbell Soup, and Campbell's tomato growers in Ohio and its Vlasic pickle growers in Michigan signed a unique three-year labor contract covering 800 farmworkers. The contracts set hourly wage rates for workers on harvesters and for truck drivers. Piece rates were also set for hand pickers, plus incentive payments for higher yields. In addition, the contracts established a paid holiday (Labor Day) and set up an experimental health insurance program. Full prior disclosure of conditions of employment (the time period, place, pay rates, and activities) was established. And at the end of the season, each worker was to be provided a full itemized written report of all earnings and expenses.

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Most of the above history comes from W.K. Barger and Ernesto Reza, *The Farm Labor Movement in the Midwest* (U. of Texas Press, 1994). Mike Ferner of FLOC and Matt Emmick of the National Farm Worker Ministry contributed to the material on North Carolina. For more information on FLOC contact: <www.iupui.edu/~floc>.

FLOC had originally stated that its long-term goals included structural changes in the agribusiness system that affected farmworkers' lives. The contracts with Campbell Soup was only the start, and similar agreements with Vlasic, Heinz, Green Bay, and Aunt Jane corporation and their pickle growers in Ohio and Michigan were subsequently signed. In all, over 7,000 workers are now represented by FLOC under union contracts.

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*One grower near New Bern, N.C. said, "The North won the War on paper but we confederates actually won because we kept our slaves. First we had sharecroppers, then tenant farmers and now we have Mexicans."*

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In subsequent years, all contracts were renewed. Perhaps one of the most important features of these contracts was that they formally eliminated sharecropping arrangements. All workers were now clearly classified as paid employees with a minimum earnings guarantee. They also received incentives for quantity and quality of the cucumbers picked. In addition, they received workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, and social security. Clauses were also included that provided field sanitation facilities and protections against pesticides. Furthermore, only workers 15 and older could be employed, thus contractually eliminating child labor. "Elimination of the sharecropping system was won by

farmworkers," Velasquez says, "not by lawyers or politicians."

## Organizing in North Carolina

With farmworkers in all the major pickle operations in the Midwest under contract, FLOC has turned its attention to North Carolina, where most of the same companies also have pickle operations. Over 1,000 migrant workers in North Carolina have signed union authorization cards asking FLOC to represent them. Many labor, church, and civic organizations have endorsed FLOC's efforts to bring the same self-determination and improved conditions achieved by Midwestern farmworkers to North Carolina.

The conditions of farmworkers in North Carolina are among the poorest and most oppressive in the nation. The workers are supportive of FLOC's efforts, but are afraid because of grower intimidation. One grower near New Bern said, "The North won the War on paper but we confederates actually won because we kept our slaves. First we had sharecroppers, then tenant farmers and now we have Mexicans." A grower in Harnet County said that the H2-A (foreign "Guest Worker") Association owned the workers, and that he could not talk with FLOC representatives without going through the Association.

In Pink Hill, about 100 H-2A workers escaped their grower under the cover of darkness. They were forced to work a 14-hour day with only one half-hour break. This break consisted of getting on a bus driving from the field to the camp, eating lunch, and driving back to the field. They said they had no mattresses or sheets. One worker who was interviewed was identified as "Worker #4." All the workers in the field had hats with their numbers. The grower is known among the workers as *El Diablo* (the Devil). There are rumors that he has held workers at gunpoint, has beaten workers, and has bragged about having a graveyard for

workers who can't keep up — though he swears he is an upstanding individual.

In June 1998, FLOC leaders, farmworkers, and farm labor supporters from area and national churches, organized labor, and other groups concerned with justice, marched from Mt. Olive, N.C. to Raleigh to call attention to the need for self-determination among North Carolina's farmworkers.

Velasquez said, "This march is to focus the conscience of the country on how immigrant laborers in America are forced to live and work. We believe that in order to start changing the public policy that leads to such notorious conditions in agriculture, we must negotiate directly with the parties that have the power to make change. In North Carolina that means corporations like the Mt. Olive Company, with the resources and the obligation to initiate desperately needed improvements in wages and conditions."

He also stated, "This fight is not about overpowering an opponent. This fight is not about doing someone else in. It's about reconciling the oppressed with the oppressor. It's about reconciling the exploiter with the exploited — for everyone's good. We're not here to castigate anyone as an enemy. I've met with (Mt. Olive CEO) Bill Bryan twice. He's an amicable man doing his business. But at some point, Mr. Bryan and the executives there have to talk and reconcile the differences between us." He also said, "Bill Bryan is saying the farmworkers are not company employees, just like Campbell's CEO did 20 years ago. It took a six-year boycott to make our point, but eventually we succeeded. We have more time than the company has money."

James Andrews, state AFL-CIO president, pledged the support of his 150,000 members "today, tomorrow, and as long as it takes to get justice for those folks that work every day in the fields."

The executive director of the National



*The Gleaners* by Jean-Francois Millet, 1857

Louvre, Paris

Farm Worker Ministry, Virginia Nesmith, brought her organization's backing with her from St. Louis, stating, "We walk with a God that has always walked with those who want to go from darkness into light, from slavery into freedom, and from fear into truth."

Mt. Olive officials have thus far refused to bargain a contract with FLOC to improve the wages and conditions of the migrant workers who harvest pickling cucumbers for the firm. In October 1998, a group of FLOC, religious, labor and local citizens met in Raleigh to discuss plans for a national boycott of Mt. Olive Pickles. Velasquez explained, "We are confident that Mt. Olive CEO William Bryan will eventually come to the table because FLOC is in North Carolina to stay. If it takes a national consumer boycott of Mt. Olive products to get his attention, this meeting takes us one step closer to that. Mr. Bryan can sit down with us at the table now, or after a crippling national boycott of his

company's products. But one way or the other, we will win a contract!"

Mt. Olive Pickle is the largest pickle company in the South, and second in the U.S. behind Vlasic Corporation. Although the firm has traditionally marketed its products only in the South, it has recently begun an aggressive sales campaign in major Midwest cities, making it more vulnerable to a boycott, according to FLOC. The meeting concluded with an agreement to begin a nationwide consumer boycott of Mt. Olive products on March 17, 1999 if the pickle giant has not yet signed an agreement.

"Between now and St. Patrick's Day," Velasquez says, "we will be appearing before church conferences and union conventions to build support, and meeting in the homes of hundreds of supporters in cities and towns across the country. When we announce the boycott, it will not be called off until an agreement is signed."

TW

# Healthy farms, healthy kids

by Michelle Mascarenhas and Robert Gottlieb

**Y**ou can hear the rumblings. While across America, kids' stomachs are rumbling, sometimes from hunger, sometimes from eating unhealthy foods, many youth, parents, teachers, principals and even food service directors are starting a rumble to revolutionize school food services.

Schools have become a food security battleground. The high fat, high salt, caffeine-laden diets that prevail among school-age children have created a schools-food paradox; whether the kids get too many or too few calories, the food that school-age children eat intensifies rather than solves problems of food insecurity.

Why is this so? For one, many children are overweight and/or undernourished. Second, what is offered in the schools is often the only meal available for many school kids. Food insecurity is a condition that far too many low-income children confront daily, both inside and outside the schools.

But there is hope. The problem of access to fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate food in schools can be addressed through innovative food security strategies. These include programs to improve school nutrition, buy from local farmers, start school gardens, and train high school

students to become entrepreneurs to improve the food system in their communities. These types of programs exemplify how using locally grown sources can provide high-quality food for school children while strengthening local food systems.

## Why school meal programs?

In the first half of this century, the U.S. Armed Services began noticing marked malnutrition among military recruits and draftees. Malnourished as children, many of these men had developed health problems that made them unfit to serve during wartime.

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*Fast food and junk food companies also often pay for advertising in "educational" videos that are shown in classrooms. Thus, fast food is often legitimized by the schools as much as it is in the larger society.*

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In order to reduce the alarming rate of malnourished children, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) started the National School Lunch Program in order to assure that every child would receive at least one meal each day. The National School Breakfast Program was instituted with the recognition that all children, regardless of income, need breakfast in order to concentrate on learning.

These programs assure a free or reduced-price breakfast or lunch for children in families meeting certain income

eligibility requirements. They also assure the school districts and other agencies that administer the programs a reimbursement for every meal served under the guidelines.

But today, as they see what is being served in school cafeterias in their communities, many concerned adults are asking, "What happened to the goal of serving meals to help make children healthy?"

In many school districts across the country, food services have shifted from operating under a mission to provide nutritious meals to children to a mission to generate sufficient revenues to cover costs. In their book, *What Are We Feeding Our Kids?*, Michael Jacobson and Bruce Maxwell describe the current framework under which school food services often operate. As a consequence of perceived financial constraints, many food service directors have chosen to contract out to fast food chains, sell soda and chips to generate additional revenue, sell exclusive contracts to brand-name junk food producers, or purchase the cheapest possible products which meet the USDA guidelines for school meals.

Faced with cutbacks in funding, many school food services have chosen to:

- select the lowest-priced bid without heavily weighing in quality or freshness;
- reduce labor at the school site and purchase preprocessed foods or foods which are prepared at a central kitchen, taking control away from the school site and giving it to the central administrators;

- privatize school functions by providing exclusive contracts to companies such as Coke or Pepsi in exchange for donated amenities such as sports scoreboards. In early 1998, a student at Greenbriar High School in Evans, Ga. was suspended for wearing a Pepsi shirt on his school's "Coke day." School officials had launched Coke day in order to show regional Coke officials that the school was highlighting

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Coke in order to win a \$500 contest.

Fast food and junk food companies also often pay for advertising in “educational” videos that are shown in classrooms. Thus, fast food is often legitimized by the schools as much as it is in the larger society.

Some observers have noted that many eligible children do not use federal meal programs because they simply do not like the food. At the same time, because children are bombarded with advertising for fast food and junk food, they often request these brand name foods at school and choose them over healthier, unbranded choices which do not have catchy messages attached to them.

The impact of poor nutrition on children is staggering. Having a poor diet during childhood can contribute to obesity, anemia, susceptibility to lead poisoning, and poor school performance. In contrast, those children who eat fresh fruits and vegetables can get a head start in reducing their future risk of certain cancers, heart disease, hypertension, and other chronic diseases. The ability to learn and function more effectively is also strongly linked to diet.

### **Innovations in school meals**

Innovative school districts and community members are doing the following to increase access to fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate foods in schools:

- using locally grown and/or locally prepared food in the cafeteria;
- educating students about where food comes from through school gardens and farm tours;
- involving students in preparing culturally appropriate and nutritious meals;
- helping students develop life skills through cooking classes, gardening and nutrition education.

In Los Angeles, the Occidental College Community Food Security Project launched a successful Farmers’ Market Salad Bar in the 1997-1998 school year at



*Farmhouse pantry by Mary Azarian*

a school where half the students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The program was extremely successful at getting kids to make healthy choices because the food was freshly harvested by local farmers and chopped with love by parents and staff.

School gardens have also become a popular strategy for connecting children directly to producing fresh foods, learning about nutrition, health and the environment in the process. In many schools, gardens are used as outdoor classrooms for math, science, biology, reading and writing lessons.

On the national level, the USDA and other federal agencies can encourage buying produce from local farmers. Recognizing this, the USDA has launched a small scale “farm-to-school” initiative. This initiative now needs to be expanded in order to identify and begin addressing the barriers to farmers and school produce buyers making local connections. For instance, some districts have found that USDA “standard pack and grade” restrictions limit a small farmer’s access

to school markets. The USDA should study this and other such barriers and work with farmers, school districts and food security advocates to develop solutions. Finally, the USDA should support and publicize pilot projects such as farmers’ market purchasing programs.

Today, many teachers and school nurses complain that the cafeteria often undercuts their efforts to educate students to make healthy choices. At the state level, education departments should work with health departments to integrate the mission of providing food to children with the mission of improving child health.

At the local level, this would translate into an integration of nutrition education and growing healthy food in the garden with serving fresh, nutritious and tasty food in the cafeteria. This may mean bringing cafeteria staff into the classroom to conduct cooking classes or involving parents in the development of the menus so that nutrition education is conducted for the whole family.

**TW**

# 'In that great gettin' up morning': an anniversary interview with Barbara Harris

by Julie A. Wortman

**Julie A. Wortman:** On February 11, 1989, you were consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts, becoming the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion. I was one of the hundreds of Episcopalians from all over the country who crowded into that cavernous public auditorium near Copley Square for the occasion. Scores of ordained woman, in particular, made it their business to vest so that they could be part of the opening procession — it took at least a half hour, if not longer, before all the visiting and local clergy had filed in. And then there was the ripple of applause that announced that, although most in the congregation couldn't yet see you, you had finally entered the hall. Everyone who was there will have their own memories of that event, but after 10 years, what do you remember best about that historic service?

**Barbara Harris:** Much of it remains, but the most dramatic thing for me was walking into that auditorium in the procession, seeing that throng of people, which I did not anticipate, and hearing people calling my name, calling out, "We love you," and applauding. It was humbling, it was moving, it was overwhelming.

The other thing that sticks in my mind was that I was to come in on some very stately music and the timing got a little out of sync and the St. Paul A.M.E. choir was supposed to have finished the pre-service

music, but as our part of the procession came in, they were singing, "In that great gettin' up morning" and "Ride on, King Jesus." And I said to Ed Rodman, who was one of my attending presbyters, "What a hell of a welcome!"

**J.W.:** Do you have a sense of what your consecration meant to people then?

**B.H.:** For many, my consecration was the beginning of the completion of the ordained ministry. But for some I became something of an icon. In a *Witness* article

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*I think many people hoped that I would speak to issues that were important to them in a way that was going to make a difference. But although I could speak to the issues, and I did, it was unreal to imagine that alone I could make any dramatic change.*

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at the time Carter Heyward very wisely cautioned people about placing unreal expectations and demands on me as one person who could not fulfill all their hopes.

**J.W.:** What do you think people hoped? After all, before you were elected bishop you were associated with *The Witness* and had a pretty good reputation as a rabble rouser, a troublemaker.

**B.H.:** I think many people hoped that I would speak to issues that were important to them in a way that was going to make a difference. But although I could speak to the issues, and I did, it was unreal to imagine that alone I could make any

dramatic change. I found that out very early in the House of Bishops because as the only woman there I could be ignored. And for much of that first one or two years, I think I was.

**J.W.:** What are the issues to which you have given the greatest attention during these past 10 years?

**B.H.:** Certainly, one of my concerns has been that we be a more inclusive church. But I've also been concerned with issues such as the death penalty, with issues of quality education for children, affirmative action, and equality of opportunity which we have not addressed fully.

I have a particular concern about increasing the number of people of color in the ordained ministry and to that end, along with my diocesan bishop here in Massachusetts, Tom Shaw, and the bishops of Ohio and Los Angeles, we are hosting a conference for young people of color to explore vocations and ministry in the Episcopal Church.

**J.W.:** I have heard it said that the church is not a friendly place for someone who is a person of color pursuing ordination. Do you think it is?

**B.H.:** Historically the church has not been friendly to people of color. I think there are places in the church that are serious today about embracing people of color in the ordained ministry because there is a realization that they are needed if the church is going to grow among people of color and thereby give legitimacy to the church's claim of being catholic.

**J.W.:** Did becoming a bishop change your ability to be a rabble rouser? What kind of shift did that entail?

**B.H.:** The shift has come in that you don't have the freedom to move and do what you could do in a less structured role. You get elected to be a bishop to a much broader constituency and your actions get tempered whether you want them to or not, by virtue of the role to which you have been elected. And certainly, as a suffragan bishop, I didn't have the power of a diocesan bishop.

**J.W.:** Is there any opportunity, any possibility, that the Episcopal Church is going to be a place where things are

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**Julie A. Wortman** is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>.



going to be turned upside-down?

**B.H.:** I don't know that the church will ever turn things really upside-down the way that we would like to see them turned upside-down. But I think one good barometer of where the church is, is to track the votes in the House of Deputies. At the last General Convention in Philadelphia in 1997 a vote on blessing same-sex unions lost by one vote in each order. That was a pretty good barometer for me that the church is not as far to the right as it sometimes appears. I think the voices on the right are strident, but their intensity is out of proportion to their numbers. Unless the makeup of the House of Deputies changes drastically between now and the next General Convention in Denver in 2000, that vote might be positive next time.

**J.W.:** I'm kind of hopeful that there will be something significant around the issue of money and debt coming up at General Convention 2000 — especially following Lambeth's call for forgiveness of third-world debt. Do you have a sense that that's likely to be the case?

**B.H.:** With the subject having been so thoroughly addressed at Lambeth, I would hope that the bishops would take some leadership in bringing that issue to the church in a way that the church could make a positive response, be energized to take this issue and claim it as one for which the church has some responsibility. But that leadership, and the teaching surrounding that, needs to come from bishops who were exposed to this issue in depth at Lambeth. If we fail to take on that issue and if we allow sexuality and the ordination of women to dominate the convention in Denver, then we will have missed the opportunity to fulfill our responsibility as Christians concerned for the lives of fellow Christians in developing countries and

foreign nations. I would be content with less legislation, fewer resolutions, and to see a commitment emerge to really positively tackle this whole issue of international debt by in some way addressing the people responsible in and

keen sense of justice issues.

**J.W.:** Do you find you have allies among progressive male bishops? Is the Urban Bishops' Coalition still a force?

**B.H.:** The Urban Bishops' Coalition has gone by the boards. Two of its strongest leaders are no longer in the House — John Walker of Washington, D.C. is dead and Arthur Walmesly of Connecticut is retired. There are still bishops in the House who stand for the progressive values the Urban Bishops' Coalition held up, but they are not a real force, because they are not very organized. And because of the emphasis in recent years on being polite and collegial, I think the progressive bishops are reluctant to take decisive action that might be seen as strategizing. Progressive people, it seems, still want to give a hearing to all sides. Meanwhile, more conservative people tend to ramrod their views through and that is why they were successful at Lambeth on the anti-gay and anti-women's ordination votes [See *TW* 9/98, 10/98 and 11/98].

**J.W.:** When in your work are you the happiest? When do you feel like you're most yourself?

**B.H.:** When I can address issues of public policy in light of the Gospel. That's when I feel that I am doing what God has called me to do. And that is very fulfilling.

I have been absolutely, singularly blessed in the past four years to work with Tom Shaw as my diocesan bishop. The team ministry that we share has opened up many more opportunities for me to be the person that was consecrated 10 years ago than was possible early on in my episcopacy.

**J.W.:** And preaching is one big piece of that?

**B.H.:** Yes, it is. I have many opportunities to preach and I try to use those opportunities to the fullest extent and I try to bring into all of my sermons what I feel



Barbara Harris

The Episcopal Times/David Zadig

for monetary funds, the World Bank and others. If we could get church people to engage them, and our legislators on the national and state and local levels, that would be a marvelous piece of ministry.

**J.W.:** It surely would. Who are your allies these days as you work for justice?

**B.H.:** Well primarily my allies are in the church and I find them in such coalitions as the Consultation, the Urban Caucus, the Massachusetts Council of Churches and individuals in the Episcopal Church and other denominations who have a



is the gospel call to justice. So that as I speak to a group about stewardship, I talk about investing in the church, and investing in peace, investing in justice. I consider that God has given me a gift to speak clearly and that it is my responsibility to use that gift.

**J.W.:** In using that gift you've been an important mentor to many in the church. But who have been your mentors?

**B.H.:** I've always looked to my clergy mentors. My rector, Paul Washington; Van Bird, who was so instrumental in my formation as I was preparing for ordination. I consider Sue Hiatt a mentor because of her very clear understanding of ministry and particularly of women's ministry. I count some women of color in other denominations as mentors despite the fact that my personal contact with them is limited, but I have occasions to hear them and read their writings. Women like Delores Williams, Jacqueline Grant, Katie Cannon, Joan Martin, Ella Mitchell.

**J.W.:** You mention people from other denominations from whom you learn. What do you think the future of denominationalism is? There are some people who are saying a period of post-denominationalism is emerging.

**B.H.:** That eventually may be true, but I would think it is some years away in that denominations are wedded to preserving institutions and guard them almost jealously. Efforts at ecumenism have been in most instances furtive, without a lot of depth. Even this whole series of covenants and concordats have not really plumbed the depths of being together as Christians in a really meaningful way, in ways that could shape and change things in the world.

**J.W.:** What would be necessary to get to something like that?

**B.H.:** For me it would mean a serious commitment to working together in a coalesced effort that didn't require any one group to get credit for what was undertaken and to address issues in a way that our present statements don't do, because our present statements get so watered down as we try to appease all of the constituencies and all the factions

involved. If we could do away with watered-down statements and say we're going to roll up our sleeves and take some concerted action that was "full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes!" it could make a difference. That to me would be serious ecumenism.

**J.W.:** Do you see any signs that young people are taking on the work for justice?

**B.H.:** I went to a conference on economic justice recently where younger people played an impressive role. And a young

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*Many young people operate outside of the church because for them the church is not willing or able to move in the forceful, dramatic ways that are needed to make a difference.*

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lawyer I've known from childhood is using his legal abilities for a coffee cooperative. To see young people like these seriously moving on issues is a hopeful sign.

If young investment brokers and young lawyers like my friend and young people in other professions could come together and look at the stake that we all have in rectifying the power imbalances, the economic imbalances, the environmental imbalances, and the educational imbalances in our communities it would be wonderful. But many of these young people operate outside of the church because for them the church is not willing or able to move in the forceful, dramatic ways that are needed to make a difference. Within the church they're not freed up enough to move the way they see that we need to move to address these issues. I would say that it's because we are wedded to preserving the institution and we are using old models that no longer work. We are so busy trying to make nice, but you cannot temporize with injustice.

**J.W.:** So you're not seeing that new blood in the church.

**B.H.:** No. We've missed a generation in the church. In this diocese, we are making a conscious effort to develop leadership among young people who are still with us in the church and to provide a place for them to exercise that leadership. If we can successfully do that, we may hold on to some of these people who are going to be the professionals of a few years hence. We've created a youth leadership academy that begins with sophomores in high school who make a three-year commitment to this program. It's brand new. But if we can help that leadership to develop and emerge and repeat that successfully year after year, by taking a new group of sophomores in high school and keeping them involved by providing meaningful opportunities for them to exercise their gifts for leadership, maybe some new leadership will emerge. And that's where I'm pinning my hopes.

**J.W.:** The question that is frequently asked at anniversary moments like this is, what difference have women bishops made?

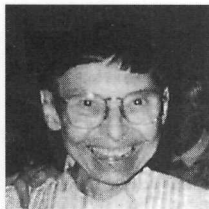
**B.H.:** Oh, I think having women bishops has made a tremendous difference in that compared to the male bishops we tend to be more outspoken, more forthright, more honest in what we say on the occasions that we speak. I think, too, that we tend to demand greater accountability in the dialogue and in addressing issues.

Women have also made a big contribution to the church in other ways, which we mustn't overlook. Women scholars, for example, have made a contribution to biblical criticism, to theological reflection, in ways that we did not see a quarter of a century ago. There has also been great cost, great personal cost. I think about the first 11 women ordained in the Episcopal Church. There was great personal cost to several of them. But they persevered and did not necessarily count that cost. So the gifts that women have brought to the corporate table, not just in the House of Bishops, have been tremendous. The very fact of our presence has made a difference and I think that the ministry of laywomen has been enlarged and emboldened by women's gains in the ordained ministry.

## Remembering Frances Schwab and Mary Durham

In 1998 the Episcopal Church lost two elder activists, Frances Schwab and Mary Durham, both of whom will be sorely missed by their many friends and colleagues. Each was a staunch and enthusiastic supporter of *The Witness*.

Schwab, 85, died in May 1998 in Boston, Mass. A social worker, she became active in the Congress of Racial Equality during the 1960s and was one of the early members of New England War Tax Resistance. She later joined the Christian



Frances Schwab

pacifist group Ailanthus, which held protests against weapons development.

Schwab was a member of Boston's Church of the Advent and a member of St. Hilda's Fellowship, which she helped form in 1981. She was also an associate of the Episcopal Society of St. Margaret and member of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship.

Mary Durham, 89, died in November 1998 in Beverly Hills, Mich., a suburb of Detroit. A member of the Society of the Companions of the



Mary Durham

Holy Cross, she worked long and hard for women's full inclusion in the life of the church and was among the first women seated as deputies to General Convention — and continued to serve as a deputy to General Convention for many years afterwards.

Durham held numerous other diocesan and national church offices, including membership on the national Executive Council. She was a strong proponent of women's ordination and of racial and economic justice. At the time of her death she was actively involved in organizing a Michigan chapter of the Episcopal Women's Caucus.

Durham was a member of Christ Church Cranbrook, in Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

## A gathering of rural chaplains

The farm crisis in the U.S. again has reached a critical stage. It is known that the loss of family farms can function as a "seedbed" for unrest, community trauma and an increase in acts of hatred, violence and domestic abuse. Recent data from the Heartland Network, a United Methodist-related rural center serving annual conferences in the Midwest, indicates that the crisis in agricultural communities is deepening. For instance, on September 14, 1998, a Missouri farm sold a semi-trailer load of wheat in St. Louis for \$2.12 per bushel. After paying the trucker 32 cents per bushel, the farmer received \$1.80 per bushel. Last year that same farmer received \$3.74 per bushel, a decrease of 43 per cent in one year's time, with no drop in the costs of cultivation, seed, fertilizer, and other inputs. Between 1997 and 1998 most commodity prices have shown heavy decreases.

At the same time, in many rural communities, the loss of farms and home-town businesses, an unstable economic base, and emerging cultural diversity have resulted in racist

responses and outright violence/terror, according to data collected by The Center for New Community, an ecumenical program working nationally and providing information on various kinds of violence and hate activities. Small towns and open country communities and their churches are often in denial of and rarely are equipped to deal with these kinds of prejudice and acts of violence.

The Rural Chaplains Association of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church is calling for a gathering early in 1999 to address these issues. This Gathering will provide updated information on the reality of the economic crisis now facing many farm families and will alert rural chaplains to potential acts of hate and violence. Organizers have set a goal for participants of at least 30 United Methodist chaplains and 30 other church and community leaders.

For more information, contact the Rural Chaplains Association, PO Box 29044, Columbus, Ohio 43229; telephone/fax 614-882-6067.

## Stock given in memory of Katharine Parker

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company (ECPC), publisher of *The Witness*, is pleased to announce it has received a gift to its endowment fund of 200 shares of stock worth more than \$10,000. The gift is made in memory of Katharine Parker, an active Episcopalian, who felt called to the priesthood all her adult life. The Episcopal Church, however, did not allow women priests in time for Parker to pursue ordination.

Income from ECPC's investments, which are managed in a socially responsible manner, is crucial to the ongoing life of *The Witness*. The ECPC board and the magazine's staff are very appreciative of this gift and the support it represents for our work.

## Honest, our revamped website is up and running!

Numerous readers contacted us to ask if our November announcement of a revamped website, complete with updates on co-editor Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's medical situation, was a hoax. It wasn't. Check out <[www.thewitness.org](http://www.thewitness.org)>.

# Sweet charity?

by Marianne Arbogast

*Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, by Janet Poppendieck, Viking, 1998.

Good King Wenceslas was not so good after all, Janet Poppendieck suggests in her new book, *Sweet Charity?*, in which she challenges the growing institutionalization of “emergency” food programs and the disappearance of a government safety net. Instead of carrying food to the needy, Poppendieck asks, “suppose Wenceslas had turned his attention to mobilizing the poor of his kingdom to assert their rights to a fair share of the fruits of their toil, and to creating structures of mutual aid as a hedge against want.” Then, of course, he might not have been regarded as quite so saintly, but in the long run, the poor would have been better off.

Poppendieck diagnoses our society as afflicted by “the Wenceslas syndrome,” “the process by which the joys and demands of personal charity divert us from more fundamental solutions to the problems of deepening poverty and growing inequality, and the corresponding process by which the diversion of our efforts leaves the way open to those who want more inequality, not less.”

Marianne Arbogast is *Witness* assistant editor, <marianne@thewitness.org>, and co-manager of Manna Community Meal in Detroit, Mich.

A sociologist, Poppendieck visited food pantries and soup kitchens across the country, interviewing staff and volunteers. The result is a provocative history of the proliferation of emergency food programs since the early 1980s, a description of their shortcomings and inadequacy as a centerpiece of social policy, and a challenging analysis of their usefulness to an array of societal interests — some benign and others highly questionable.

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*Poppendieck believes that the side benefits of soup kitchens and food pantries are so numerous that “if we didn’t have hunger, we’d have to invent it.”*

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Poppendieck believes that the institutionalization of emergency food programs has been abetted by their ability to fulfill a host of functions beyond their apparent primary purpose — from waste reduction to community service opportunities to support for the right-wing claim that volunteerism is a viable alternative to government protection of economic rights. She devotes a whole chapter of her book to describing the many benefits experienced by volunteers in food programs: companionship, physical exercise, a sense of purpose and a way to relieve the guilt of privilege. In her view, the side benefits of soup kitchens and food pantries are so numerous that “if we didn’t have hunger, we’d have to invent it.”

As Poppendieck explains, “emergency food” has become a euphemism. Large

numbers of people rely on soup kitchens and food pantries not to tide them over temporary crises, but as normal, ongoing sources of food. Food banks build their own facilities and engage in long-term planning and development as efficiently as any business corporation.

Poppendieck offers a compelling critique of “hunger” as the way we identify the problem.

“We need to avoid getting caught up in debates like those that characterized the hunger wars of the mid 1980s, about whether people are actually hungry, because it is the wrong question. A program or policy that tries only to prevent acute hunger is aiming too low.... We need to aim for the creation of a just and inclusive society that taps everyone’s potential and makes us all better off in the long run, not just a society where no one starves.”

It would be hard to respond to this with anything but a resounding “amen.” That is the book’s strength — and its weakness. As a passionate affirmation of human dignity and equality — and a warning that these values may be imperiled when emergency food becomes the norm — Poppendieck’s work is challenging and inspirational. What it doesn’t offer is a practical alternative course of action.

At times, Poppendieck seems to imply that government entitlement programs can accomplish what needs to be done. She defends food stamps, pointing out their drawbacks — from insufficient allotments to the hassle involved in the application process — but implying that these could be remedied. At other times, her perspective seems broader, but is spelled out only in the vaguest of terms. For instance, she puts forth this vision:

“Imagine that we opened community dinner programs in our public schools, where parents picking up their children from after-school programs could share a meal with them, where senior citizens could enjoy an inexpensive night out, where teen-

review



agers could learn culinary skills and earn a little spending money, where local artists could display their work and musicians could perform and poets could read. Suppose that churches and synagogues could purchase tickets for such meals and distribute them to the hungry people who now congregate in their soup kitchens and food pantries so that these people will be less isolated, more integrated with the larger community."

I'd like that, too. But right now, the hungry people at the soup kitchen where I work can barely co-exist in the same building with a social service agency doing street outreach to women. In the space of one week, as a recent letter from their director protested, they had to contend with one of our mentally ill guests who exposed himself to women on their doorstep; another — alcoholic as well as mentally ill — who screams continually, claims to have head lice and is trying to spread them to others; and a parking lot drama in which two men — armed with a knife and a metal pipe — came after one of our guests who had stolen something from their car.

I resonate with the spirit of Poppendieck's vision, but it seems more an image of the heavenly banquet than an

action plan for the foreseeable future. Hunger in the U.S. is related not only to economic inequality, but to mental illness, substance abuse and other problems that afflict our entire society and need to be addressed on many levels.

Poppendieck expresses optimism about the potential for building a movement around "an inclusive vision of economic fairness and security," that "will integrate rather than segregate poor people, that will cast them in the role of fellow workers for the greater good rather than grateful recipients of our exertions on their behalf." She doesn't insist that we all drop our soup ladles and pick up our pens or placards; she does endorse models of cooperation and the integration of poor people into meaningful roles — values that many involved in soup kitchens and pantries hold deeply and find painfully difficult to implement.

The Catholic Worker has always argued for radical social change, even while making soup. Although our volunteers at Manna Community Meal span the political spectrum, I seriously doubt that any are tempted to regard the soup kitchen as a solution to poverty or hunger. Most are deeply concerned about preserving the dignity of our guests. Many are committed to

political work with organizations like Bread for the World or Pax Christi. When we speak to church or school groups, we talk about the arms build-up and misplaced government priorities. For three years now, we have turned down interview requests with reporters from the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*, in support of their striking workers. These are small steps toward economic justice, but they are the ones we can see before us — as we also see before us the faces of brothers and sisters who are hungry today.

Many of us look for inspiration to saints other than Wenceslas. Dorothy Day liked to quote Vincent de Paul, who admonished that we need forgiveness for the bread we give the poor. And there's Dom Helder Camara, who observed that "If you feed the poor, they call you a saint; if you ask why people are poor, they call you a communist." We believe we need to do both.

Still, it is worth considering whether the growing numbers and respectability of soup kitchens, food pantries and food banks are dulling our sensitivity to the scandal of the need for them. If Poppendieck's book inspires more people to ask why people are poor, and to be alert to ways of fostering change, it will have served a good purpose. **TW**

## BACK ISSUES

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In the midst of today's critical showdown between independent, family-owned producers and agri-corporations, Missouri farm crisis activist Rhonda Perry relies on the power of what she calls "transformational organizing" to defeat the seemingly invincible profit-hungry agri-giants. It's an approach she has learned over a decade of working and worshiping with black urban congregations — congregations who since the late 1980s have been steadfast in supporting Missouri farm families in their fight to stay on their land.

"Five Kansas City (Mo.) churches were the places that supported the farmers in 1986," Perry says, referring to the historic 145-day action in Chillicothe, Mo., when farmers took over a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) office to protest unfair lending policies made unendurable by the unjust actions of a federal administrator.

"The ministers of these black urban congregations saw this as an opportunity to really link up — a way to fight the growing right-wing racist activities of the rural posers of that time. For many of the farmers this was their first experience where black preachers were on the courthouse steps with them. It was their first experience with understanding that you can't work for justice in isolation, but that you have to figure out ways for everyone seeking justice to work together. The black churches were there for the farmers and that changed the farmers. The rural churches in our own [white] communities were not there."

Perry is program director for the Mis-

*"For many farmers, working with the black churches was their first experience with understanding that you can't work for justice in isolation, but that you have to figure out ways for everyone seeking justice to work together."*



Rhonda Perry

## Organizing in the midst of rural crisis

by Julie A. Wortman

souri Rural Crisis Center (MRCC), a group created by Roger Allison to organize the Chillicothe protest. After Chillicothe, MRCC played a leading role in securing lending reform through passage of the Agriculture Credit Act of 1987, a bill that saved thousands of family farms with its common sense requirement that restructuring a farmer's loan must take precedence over foreclosing when restructuring the loan costs the government less than foreclosing would.

"The government had been foreclosing left and right, at a cost of billions of dollars," says Perry. "And there was no system by which borrowers could appeal. It didn't matter if you were a good farmer or what your cash flow situation was."

Perry's parents, Ron and Joyce Perry, were founding members of MRCC — and were among those who were able to save their farm because of the new legislation. Away at college studying psychology dur-

ing the Chillicothe action, Perry remembers watching from afar as her once staunchly conservative parents were transformed by their work with MRCC into progressive grassroots activists of a Jesse Jackson stripe.

"Jesse Jackson played a major role in channeling farmers' energies and their anger toward progressive farm organization," Perry explains. "He had a message of hope that meant a lot to farmers."

Perry's own conversion to farm organizing work came during a visit home to Missouri a few years later — she had abandoned a master's program in psychology and was traveling from temporary job to temporary job around Montana in the process of figuring out what else to do. Her parents urged her to attend an MRCC annual meeting.

Perry relishes the memory: "The keynote speaker was a preacher from Kansas City talking about 500 years of resistance

*Witnesses,  
the quick and the dead*

**Julie A. Wortman** is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>.

and how we all had to work together. The farmers were pretty uncertain at first, but by the end of this guy's talk everyone was on their feet, wildly applauding. Right then and there I decided that this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life."

The next Monday she quit her job and signed on with MRCC. "I had to run a phone canvass to raise the money for my keep!" Perry laughs.

Roger Allison, MRCC's founder and current executive director, eventually became her husband. Together, in addition to working for MRCC, they now also operate an 800-acre farm of their own on which, among other things, they raise hogs.

MRCC membership has steadily grown since Allison created it in 1985. At the beginning of 1988, 438 families belonged. Today, MRCC claims over 3700 families statewide. A core group of over 100 leaders is actively involved in developing chapters and program committees. About 75 percent of MRCC's membership lives at or below the poverty level, prompting a strong organizational focus on economic development and food cooperative programs that emphasize community-supported agriculture. The coops currently supply high-quality, reasonably priced food to over 1,000 limited-resource rural families each month.

But in the current economic climate, with every agricultural commodity being produced at a substantial loss to producers as the multinational agribusinesses overproduce and wait out competitors in the battle for market share (and while consumers continue to pay high prices for their food), MRCC faces a daunting uphill battle in its quest to preserve family farms. Resistance to the federal government-encouraged corporate takeover of agriculture, especially to the industrialization of livestock production and the environmental destruction associated with it, has become a prime focus of MRCC energies, involving determined coalition building

with environmental and animal welfare groups. (Traditional hog farmers like Perry and Allison don't apologize for raising animals for slaughter, but they do oppose raising animals in confining misery and injecting them with hormones and synthetic growth promoters and feeding them antibiotic-laden feed and water.) In 1995, for example, MRCC kicked off a high-profile campaign against factory farms called Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment and in 1996 the group spearheaded a successful legislative fight to create buffer zones around hog factories, provide a bonding fund for the cleanup of waste cesspools, establish a notification process for neighbors of proposed facilities and provide for community controls.

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### *"Corporatization is not based on consumer demand."*

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But the centerpiece of MRCC's efforts has been its Patchwork Family Farms project, a cooperative of family hog farms that raise their animals in a traditional way according to strict environmental and animal welfare standards. The Patchwork producers are paid 15 percent more per hog than they would get at market and never less than 43 cents a pound (the current market price is 16 cents per pound).

"Patchwork produces clean meat and the animals are raised humanely," Perry says with pride. "We haven't found anybody yet who has said, 'I'm only going to buy meat raised by a corporation!' Our meat tastes better and the price is competitive. Corporatization is not based on consumer demand."

The Patchwork Family Farms cooperative has no shortage of farmers wishing to participate, but developing the storage and transportation components of the operation has been a slow process. A grant from the Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief in the aftermath of

the 1993 flood disaster made it possible to buy a 21-foot freezer truck that was a godsend to the enterprise.

"Our analysis was that the reason so many farmers got wiped out by the flood was because they were on the edge anyway," Perry says. "So we were looking for ways to make farmers economically viable."

More recently, MRCC has received a \$195,000 three-year grant from the USDA that will pay for two part-time sales people, a second delivery truck, a driver and a full-time Patchwork project coordinator who will oversee production, labeling and processing of the Patchwork products. Last year, Patchwork sales amounted to \$130,000, a figure Perry hopes will double over the next three years.

Perry and the other Patchwork farmers also regularly take their products to church — namely to the five Kansas City congregations who participated with MRCC in the Chillicothe protest a dozen years ago.

"But we don't just come to sell Patchwork," Perry stresses. "We come to go to church. These people have become our friends. Every year we bring them to our farms and every year they bring us in to the city for Martin Luther King Day."

Worshiping in these congregations, Perry admits, has become her chief source of spiritual nurture.

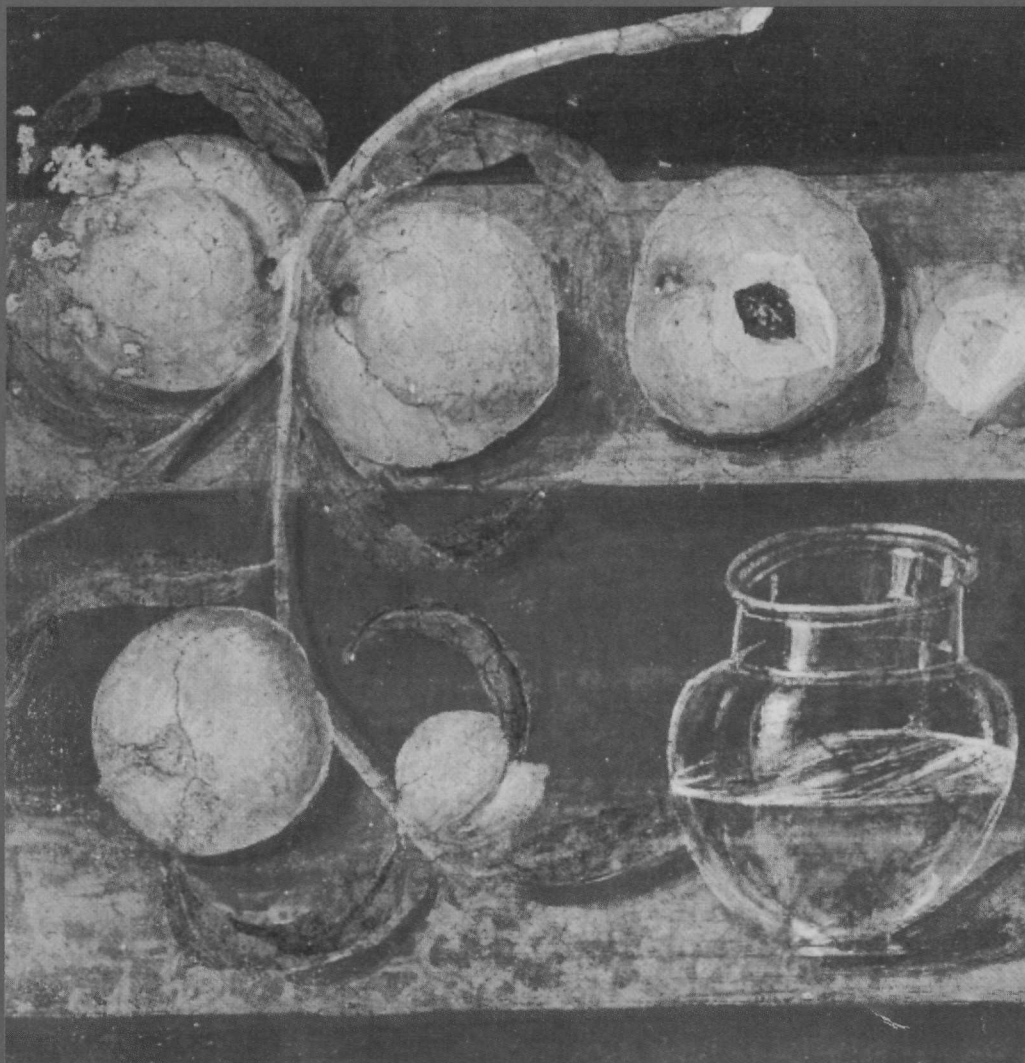
She returns to her emphasis on transformation: "These churches are about transformational organizing. They are talking about the issues that are facing their community and about coming together to do something about them."

Perry pauses for a moment to reflect on why these are the churches that have replaced the ones of her Southern Baptist heritage.

"Once you have that kind of church experience," she says at last, "it is hard to go back. It is hard to go to a place where the people talk about the Bible but nothing else."

**TW**



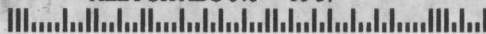


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