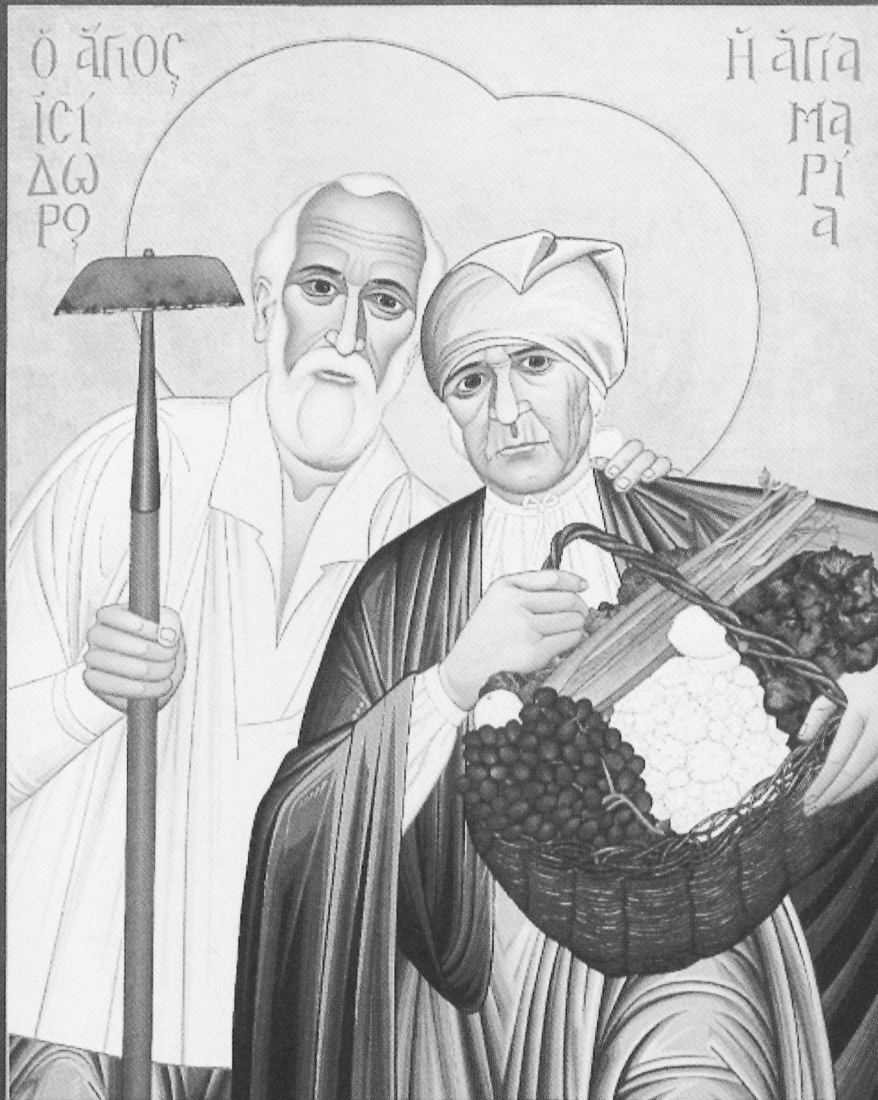


The Witness

Volume 82 • Number 11 • November 1999



SAN YSIDRO Y SANTA MARIA

Harvest feast?

Living in debt

MY NEIGHBORS, and others living in the thousands of working class neighborhoods throughout the country, are directly feeling the crunch of the increasing gap between the rich and the working class. They know directly and first hand that the people they are closest to and could become at any moment are the homeless that hang out in our community. They know and have a first-hand grip on words like Warren Beatty's (our man Bulworth) recent guest editorial in *The New York Times* who forcefully shouted out the following: "One hundred million Americans left behind in the prosperity of the global economy; that we need as a society to achieve universal health care, lift 35 million of our people out of poverty, a segment of our population that has remained virtually constant for 20 years, to give the 25 percent of our children who live in poverty a decent start in life, and to protect our environment and improve our schools and to rouse the nonvoting half of our population to participate in public life."

Mr. Beatty is reminding us of the biblical mandate for us to get mobilized and organized again to address the marginal, "the outsiders," in our society. More important, to mobilize and organize the marginal outsider again so that they can themselves address the increasing gap between those who have and those who have not in our society.

Although Mr. Beatty was addressing everyone, his message has particular bearing on the life and mission of the church. Perhaps it is time, again, for the Episcopal Church and other denominations to begin to think beyond feeding programs, handouts, and charity as an appropriate response to people in need in our society. We need a much deeper and broader strategy to respond to Mr. Beatty's editorial and to the people in my neighborhood of Dunbar John Springs living on the edge, people who with the slightest nudge could drop out of



society altogether.

Perhaps it's time for the Episcopal Church and other denominations to lay to rest its 25-year obsession with gender wars, and recognize that women and gays are fully human beings and have equal access to the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership and leadership in the Episcopal Church. Perhaps, it is time for the church to address what is really on peoples' minds in our society: making a living wage, having safe and friendly neighborhoods, decent viable schools, and having access to the basic necessities of life

like health care and adequate housing.

Perhaps it is time for the church as a community and an institution to enter into the life of people on the margins in order to save itself—to risk death in order to have real life. Perhaps it is time for the Episcopal Church to listen to Warren Beatty's final editorial words, "If not now, when?"

Paul W. Buckwalter
Tucson, AZ

A politics of place

THANK YOU SO MUCH for sending me *The Witness*' June issue, "Embracing a Politics of Place: The Penobscot Watershed." It was beautiful. A wealth of issues covered. As a socialist, I disagreed with some of Kirkpatrick Sale's philosophy, but found the interview thought-provoking, graceful and illuminating. Have marked passages to copy from "Bringing creation into the church," "On being a woman bishop," and "Favoring justice over lying fallow." Will send the magazine on to my niece Roan Katahdin, who changed her name following a walk from Mt. Katahdin to Mt. Roan (i.e. the Appalachian Trail).

I also invite *Witness* readers to write to Mordechai Vanunu and to get involved in the international campaign for his release [see

Several typographical errors in Kofi Natambu's poem escaped our proofers during production of the September 1999 issue. We're running his poem here in full with sincere apologies.

Lyric #3

by Kofi Natambu

THIS MINIMAL EXISTENCE IN THE EXTERNAL WORLD

THE WORLD OF THINGS. THE REALM OF NOISE:

CLOTHES CARS CIGARETTES LIQUOR

RATTLING CONVERSATION

THIS IDLE FEELING OF MOVEMENT WITHOUT MOTION

TIME WITHOUT MEMORY

LIVING WITHOUT FEELING

WORDS COLLIDE INTO EARCAVES BUT DON'T RESONATE

WHERE IS THE SOUND?

THE TRAJECTORY OF SIGHT IS FLAT/THE RHYTHM OF LIGHT IS LOST

THE CLOUDS STAND ABOVE NOT BEYOND,

THE EARTH GROANS BELOW NOT BEYOND

THE SUN HIDES BEHIND THE SKY A BROKEN MASS

PEEKING THRU STRUCTURES

THAT BAN ITS LOVE.

THIS FALSE DENIAL IN THE DONUT WORLD: THE WORLD OF WEIGHT

BUT NO DEPTH

THE WORLD OF MATTER BUT NO ENERGY: THE REALM OF NOISE

clothes cars cigarettes liquor rattling conversation ...

Letters

TW 10/99]. His address is Mordechai Vanunu, Ashkelon Prison, Ashkelon, Israel. For more information contact U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu, 2206 Fox Avenue, Madison, WI 53711, phone/fax (608)257-4764.

Jeanie Shaterian
Berkeley, CA

WHAT A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE it was to read the June copy of *The Witness*. It was like fresh air blowing in through an open window. I found myself reading and nodding my head "yes" and finding the affirmation of many beliefs, thoughts I have in that which was written. We do so like to find others who "agree" with us, don't we?

I'm particularly intrigued with the note about future issues, especially "pilgrimage" [see TW 7-8/99]. I have been walking the medieval route to Santiago de Compostela, Spain for the past three years (in two-week segments). This October, I plan to go to France and walk for three weeks the French part of the Camino. I will cross the Pyrenees at St. Jean de Pied and enter Spain through Pamplona where I started walking before. Pilgrimage is a subject which intrigues me greatly.

Sandy Lenthall
Williamsburg, VA



Honorary doctorate

I WAS THRILLED when I read that Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann had received an honorary doctorate from the Episcopal Divinity School [see TW 7-8/99]. I agree with all the reasons

continued on back cover

OUR GESTURES SPEAK FEAR YET WORDS
BOUNCE ALONG THE BOULEVARDS IN SLICK
PATTERNS: THESE HORN RIMMED BLOOD-DRAINED MEEK VIOLENT
SYLLABLES FALLING
DEAD FLIES OUT OF BLEEDING MOUTHS.

(the sullen shrug the accusing smile
the jagged laughs the mumbled cries)

OUR GESTURES SPEAK PAIN YET WORDS STAGGER CASUALLY DOWN
ALLEYGLASS VOCAL CHORDS INTO THE CROWDED MENTAL STREETS
THESE EXCREMENT EARS
SWOLLEN POPCORN LIPS WOODEN TONGUES
THIS EXTERNAL WORLD: THE WORLD OF DOLLARS, THE REALM OF COIN:
MEAT BRICK SUGAR METAL BILLBOARD: THE REALM OF NOISE

THIS BLANK EXISTENCE IN THE EXTERNAL WORLD
THIS WORLD OF SHADOWLESS KILOWATT FACES
DULL, BLINKING FINGERS
CRAZY NECK JERKS
STUMBLING ANKLE WALKS
DANCING EYE SCREAMS
THE REALM OF NOISE
O WHERE IS THE SOUND?

From *The Melody Never Stops* (Detroit: Past Tents Press, 1991)

Classifieds

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The Order of Jonathan Daniels is an ecumenical religious order in the Anglican tradition of Vowed and Oblate lay persons of both genders, single, committed or married, living and working in the world, who are engaged in justice ministries. Write: OJD, P.O. Box 4372, Portland, ME 04101 or <OrdJonDanl@aol.com>.

Prison stamp appeal

The Christian Prisoner Project needs stamps (limit 40 per donor) to help inmates keep in touch with loved ones during holidays. Send to Christian Williams, FSP, Rt. D18367, Box 71, Represa, CA 95671-0071.

The Witness

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Farmworkers make the harvest possible, but the grueling work and poor living conditions take a huge toll on their health. A proposed law being pushed by the agriculture industry would likely make this situation worse.

14 'Food. Health. Hope.': Monsanto, the transgenetic revolution and ethics by Donella Meadows
The transgenetic revolution has engulfed agriculture with unbelievable speed, says organic grower and scientist Meadows, but gene-splicing in the wrong hands could be a nightmare.

20 What's in the choice of a Thanksgiving turkey? by Jane Lamb
Consumers who feel bound to serve turkey on Thanksgiving have a complicated choice to make — one that may, if they aren't careful, contradict their values.

24 Plumbing Thanksgiving's 'Untold Story' by Anne Scheibner
Scheibner, whose family heritage is rooted in New England's colonial past, takes on the uncomfortable task of holding 'official' versions of Thanksgiving history up to the light.

Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." With deep roots in the Episcopal church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

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.

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Looking for a reason to feast

by Julie A. Wortman

I tend to avoid like the plague the ecumenical or interfaith community Thanksgiving services most local churches feel obligated to hold at this time of year. In fact, I find these events excruciating — both awkwardly orchestrated (in an attempt, perhaps, to avoid any possible offense) and bizarrely vacuous (which probably accounts for the usually sparse attendance).

I wonder why local church leaders put themselves through the exercise. There is, after all, nothing sacred about Thanksgiving Day. This is a national holiday whose only religious connection has to do with the colonist Pilgrims who happened to be a religious sect. It is grimly ironic, in fact, that the first official proclaiming of a “Thanksgiving Day” was to celebrate the massacre of 700 native people guilelessly gathered for their own traditional religious observance of thanksgiving (page 24).

I suspect it is the Christian community, in particular, which, like a moth drawn to flame, is compelled to find some sort of religious significance in a holiday whose central image is a meal celebrated out of gratefulness for a victory (though admittedly few are likely to be aware of the referenced massacre, inclining to think instead mostly of the invaders’ hard-won survival). And since we’ve been told from childhood that the Pilgrims were seeking religious freedom when they ventured across the Atlantic, it understandably looks like a good opportunity to celebrate and

foster mutual respect of difference — and knowledge of the (surprising?) fact that most everyone cherishes similar sorts of blessings.

The universal nature of life’s blessings is the focus, in fact, of the collect for Thanksgiving Day found in the Episcopal Church’s Book of Common Prayer: “Almighty and gracious Father [sic], we give



Harvest by Mary Azarian

you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

No prayer could more aptly contain the impulse behind this issue. In our significantly urbanized, suburbanized and regional sprawl-ized national life, the joy and relief that accompanies a harvest successfully weathered is, of course, mostly lost. As is the sober, bone-weary knowledge of the labor involved — or even what “in season” means when it comes to our favorite fruits and vegetables.

Our ignorance also embraces a scandal. Men, women and children are dying in the fields which yield such national abundance. And the crops themselves increasingly pose a risk to the very welfare of the creation we boast as God’s own, including to the health of those we warmly invite to dinner.

As people who find contained in a meal the very substance of salvation, it seems sacrilegious for Christians not to be scrupulously mindful of the qualities and cost of the national feast. Perhaps, as with much of the Thanksgiving Day story, we’d prefer not to delve too deeply. If we did we’d probably find the occasion would better merit a fast.

But fasting is not the only form of resistance we can choose if we take the church’s prayerful Thanksgiving Day intention as our own. Every community member has a hunger for healthy food, sustainably and justly produced — which gives flesh to the interfaith solidarity for which so many church leaders seem to long.

Perhaps in working towards that aim we’d generate some community religious gatherings with true heart, everyone compelled to attend because of a passionate need to express deep gratefulness for a common goal achieved — a living-wage campaign successfully undertaken, an attempt to water down food labelling standards successfully rebuffed, a program of community-supported agriculture successfully established.

To my mind such victories would be well worth celebrating — maybe even worth a feast.

TW

Julie A. Wortman is publisher and co-editor of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>. Artist **Mary Azarian**’s work can be obtained by contacting Farmhouse Press, RD2, Box 831, Plainfield, Vt. 05667.

editor's note

Thanksgiving without apologies

by Marianne Arbogast

Thanksgiving can't help but make vegetarians feel defensive. While other holiday meals may be centered around meat, no other holiday has meat as its central symbol and tradition. By the time most of us draw our first traced-hand turkey in kindergarten, we have learned to recognize it as the American Thanksgiving emblem.

"Warn your guests (or your host) beforehand," vegetarians are advised in etiquette columns, as though not serving or eating turkey on Thanksgiving is a definite lapse in appropriate behavior. A sympathetic internet site assures vegetarian hosts that "there's no need to apologize," then recommends a diversion tactic: "Keep it simple and upbeat, then tell your guests about the menu and how happy you are that they'll be coming."

I have to admit that I'm most grateful when Thanksgiving is over each year — it's hard to relax and enjoy a day requiring warnings and possibly apologies.

Six years ago — when I realized I could no longer cook meat with a quiet conscience — I faced the problem of an annual volunteer appreciation dinner that I co-host with others who share management of a soup kitchen. In the past, the Thanksgiving week meal had always featured turkey; this time, a co-worker and I spent days planning and preparing an elaborate vegetarian feast. With a few exceptions, the response was resoundingly lukewarm. We've now moved the dinner to December, when the absence of meat seems to give less offense to those we are seeking to honor.

Yet the earliest record of Thanksgiving makes no mention of turkey. In 1621, the governor of Massachusetts proclaimed that a day be set aside to "render thanks-giving ... for the abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables."

Rita Laws, writing in *The Vegetarian Journal*, says that the traditional Native American diet, shared with the first European settlers, was largely vegetarian:

The earliest record of Thanksgiving makes no mention of turkey.

"Among my own people, the Choctaw Indians of Mississippi and Oklahoma, vegetables are the traditional diet mainstay. ... Many of the Choctaw foods cooked at celebrations even today are vegetarian. Corn is so important to us it is considered divine. Our corn legend says that it was a gift from Hashtali, the Great Spirit.

"Many history textbooks tell the story of Squanto, a Pawtuxent Indian who lived in the early 1600s. Squanto is famous for having saved the Pilgrims from starvation. He showed them how to gather wilderness foods and how to plant corn. ... For most Native Americans of old, meat was not only not the food of choice, its consumption was not revered (as in modern times when Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving as if it were a religious duty). ... Big celebrations such as Fall Festivals centered around the harvest, especially the gathering of corn."

I know better (usually) than to lecture anyone on vegetarianism. I'd like to avoid self-righteousness. And often, I just don't

know what to say about something that seems, to me, embarrassingly simple. Turkeys, pigs and cows want to live, just as I do. They suffer terror and pain when attacked and killed. I don't need to eat meat to live. Even setting aside compelling arguments about health, hunger, ecology and unspeakably cruel factory farming practices, I find that more than sufficient reason to reject eating them.

A cookbook on my shelf quotes Plutarch's defense of Pythagoras' vegetarian lifestyle:

"Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstinence from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of mind the first man touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, set forth tables of dead, stale bodies, and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived. ... For the sake of a little flesh we deprive them of sun, of light, of the duration of life to which they are entitled by birth and being."

Carol Adams, author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, quotes a poem by Virginia de Araujo, who writes about a friend who creates a feast from vegetables,

*& says, On this grace I feed, I wilt
in spirit if I eat flesh, let the hogs,
the rabbits live, the cows browse,
the eggs hatch out chicks & peck seeds.*

I can't look at a dead turkey and not see the living one or the bleeding, dying one.

"Meals are the scene of life and death," one Zen teacher writes, enjoining mindful eating. That's true no matter what we eat — something dies, something else is given life. But, paying attention, I'd far rather owe my life to wheat and corn stalks, fruit trees, potato and bean plants, than to the slaughter of feeling, suffering fellow creatures. I'm grateful — even on Thanksgiving — to be able to do that.

TW

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

Desire and Free Trade

by Charles Gervin

All day, this particular
Grey day, after Thanksgiving
We, carrying our car coats,
Haunted the malls;
Seeing so many pale, but never exact
Reflections or repercussions of ourselves
In the chrome, on glass
And in the ridged chic
of the mannequins
Until everything-even ourselves were reduced
Into a thick numbing stupor.

We ate our hot dogs and drank
A gigantic cherry-coke at the snack bar
Of a bright yellow linoleum fast food joint,
Then we took to the lanes again
Hoping to find something, anything.

From Hipology, Broadside Press, Detroit, 1990.



Harvest's blood, sweat and tears

by Jane Slaughter

Asked how long she's been a farmworker, Lucia Salinas answers simply "all my life." Her parents and grandparents were migrant farmworkers, and she was born while her mother and father were on the road, picking cotton in north Texas. Her life has been split between a home base in Donna, Tex., and the flat fields of Michigan. She's picked tomatoes and cucumbers and oranges and asparagus and cotton; this fall she's working "from when the sun is up and the sun is down, Monday through Sunday" to grade the potatoes that her husband and the other men dig out of the ground on a farm near Samaria, Michigan.

Salinas is 40 years old. She and her husband and their two children still at home spend April to November in a camp for migrant workers, provided by the farmer who is their employer. They are paid \$6 an hour; at the end of the season they receive a bonus that the farmer determines. Their rooms are cramped, and showers and toilets are shared among the 10 families in the camp, in separate buildings away from the living units. Still, they are luckier than some migrant camp dwellers, since they have flush toilets rather than Porta-johns. Salinas and the other women have made the outsides of the units bright with flowers.

Throughout our talk, Salinas speaks of her four children. The two teenagers have

trouble every year when they switch schools in mid-semester. On the bus, Michigan kids taunt them as "tomato pickers." "They don't even know what we do," says Salinas. "They don't realize, what they're eating, where it comes from." She is trying to convince and prod her children to finish their schooling so they will not have to suffer as their parents have.

Migrant farmworkers live and work in conditions that give them a life expectancy of 49 and an infant mortality rate 25 percent higher than the national average.

Migrant farmworkers live and work in conditions that give them a life expectancy of 49 and an infant mortality rate 25 percent higher than the national average. The state of farmworkers' health has been a national scandal for decades, of course, and the federal government has responded in some ways. Slowly, a few protections have been won—requirements for drinking water and toilets in the fields, rules on pesticides, clinics for migrants. But enforcement of the few laws that exist is abysmal, and the government-supported clinics reach only 15 to 20 percent of those who need them.

When Salinas heard that a social service agency called Migrant Health Promotion was offering training to become a Camp Health Aide, she was eager to learn all she could. She displays a sign outside her door, "*Promotora de Salud*" ("health promoter"), and is eager to share her

knowledge with neighbors and co-workers and "mostly, to feel like I'm somebody." It was only a few years ago that Salinas' family worked in far worse conditions. She tells of the asparagus farmer in Three Rivers, Mich., who refused to provide sanitary facilities in the fields and grumbled when the workers built their own outhouse. She tells of family members trying to make a joke of peeing behind a tarp, because there was no other place to go. She visited friends whose camp buildings had "no sheetrock, just outside walls" and "bunk beds with yucky mattresses, holes everywhere."

Salinas hopes these conditions are part of her past, but a growing number of farmworkers are living them—and worse—today. A key reason is that a rising share of the farm workforce is foreign-born and undocumented, and employers can take advantage of this intimidated workforce without fear of revolt.

Americans are accustomed to thinking of our country as one that, for better or worse, has just about left its agricultural past behind. The family farm is indeed in a long decline. But more interest in healthy eating habits has had an important effect: Over the last 20 years the U.S. production of fruits and vegetables—which depends on "hired" farmworkers—has expanded by two-thirds. More than 85 percent of the fruits and vegetables grown here are hand-harvested and/or cultivated: Workers stake tomatoes, hand-pick apples and peaches, harvest asparagus or chilies, separate scabby potatoes from the blemish-free specimens consumers demand. Almost all this work is seasonal, providing no permanent full-time jobs. So farmworkers adapt their life cycles to those of the crops. Most of the 40 percent

Detroit **Jane Slaughter** is a labor writer, <Janesla@aol.com>. Photographer **Jim West** also lives in Detroit. **The National Farm Worker Ministry**, a faith-based group that champions the efforts of farmworker unions, can be contacted at 1337 W. Ohio St., Chicago, IL 60622; (312) 829-6436; <www.nfwm.org>.



Camp Health Aide Lucia Salinas (right) talks to Noelia Gloria about Gloria's health questions at Lennard's camp near Monroe, Mich. Gloria's two-year-old daughter, Juanita, looks on.

Jim West

who migrate to find work shuttle between a home in the southern U.S. or Mexico and fields further north.

At least 69 percent of the 2.5 million hired crop farmworkers in this country are foreign-born now, compared to 60 percent just in 1989. In the Florida citrus groves and the North Carolina tobacco fields, young Latino immigrants have replaced U.S.-born African Americans. Two researchers noted dryly in a June 1999 occupational medicine journal, "In spite of U.S. agriculture's unprecedented dependence on foreign-born hired farm workers, lawmakers and agencies have

been unable to reconcile this dependence with immigration policy." In 1995 about 37 percent of hired farmworkers were undocumented, a dramatic change from 1989, when the figure was 7 percent.

Many of these foreign-born workers speak only Spanish, but a growing number are indigenous people from southern Mexico or Guatemala — Mixtecs, Zapotecs and Maya — who speak their own languages. A survey of 19 labor camps in San Diego County, Calif., found that 40 percent of the residents spoke one of 14 indigenous dialects. Another segment of farmworkers are Haitians, speak-

ing Creole.

Poverty and poor health

The health problems of farmworkers can be thought of in three categories, although all are connected. First are specific injuries and illnesses caused by field labor as it is now organized. Second, for farmworkers who are migrants, are the problems caused by moving from one place to another. Third are the health problems endemic to poverty plus racial discrimination.

Andrea Steege, a researcher with the federal government's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

(NIOSH), says poverty is the most important cause of farmworkers' ill health. "If they didn't need a job so badly they wouldn't put up with the work conditions," Steege said. "And they definitely wouldn't migrate."

Maria Rodriguez-Winter of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (FLOC), sees each factor at work. She organizes the union's summer mobile clinic that visits migrant labor camps near Toledo, Ohio. Each camp receives one three-hour visit per year — a drop in the bucket compared to workers' health needs. Some of those recruited from Oaxaca and Chiapas have never seen a physician, says Rodriguez-Winter. She sees ringworm and blackened, fungus-infected toenails caused by working in wet fields; rashes — poison ivy is common in the fields, in addition to pesticides; and above all "backaches, muscle aches, leg aches."

"We will write up prescriptions," she says, "but many don't have the money to pay for it. Their home state clinic might provide prescriptions, but they don't have enough medicine to last the whole time they're up here, so they ration it out by half. We refer them to clinics that are funded to deal with farmworkers, but there are long waits. Mostly they just say 'me aguanto' — 'I'll bear it' — until I get home."

Nurse Mary Jane Flores, a volunteer on the clinic project, spoke of the frustrations: "When we couldn't take care of a problem they presented we would refer them to the migrant clinic. But it's only available on Monday nights, and they can spend hours and not be seen. You and I would be up in arms, but they just take it."

According to a 1997 survey, three out of five farmworkers earn annual incomes below the poverty level (now \$16,700 for a family of four), and half earn less than \$7,500. Clearly, when the decision is between food and medicine, or between

visiting the doctor and staying on the job during peak earning season, in-your-face economics trumps health care.

Farmworkers' economic barriers to good health are very high. Often stuck in isolated areas, they may lack transportation to a clinic. Very few farmworker employers provide health insurance, and only 12 states require workers compensation coverage. Even in states that do require workers comp for farmworkers, such as California, it may be problematic for a worker to use it: The worker must

In some other industries that are prone to repetitive strain injuries, unions — or workers comp costs — have forced employers to reengineer work procedures or redesign tools. Farm employers have no such incentive. Labor is cheap and replacements are plentiful.

know that he has a right to it, initiate a case, prove that his injury was work-related, and fight the employer through the appeals process. Some states impose a 45-day residency requirement for Medicaid eligibility, and the undocumented do not qualify for Medicaid in any case. For farmworkers who are citizens or working legally, estimates are that only 35 percent of those with children use Medicaid. These circumstances cause farmworkers to postpone seeking health care until their condition becomes so severe that they cannot work, and then hit the emergency room.

Moving from state to state compromises the ability to deal with many seri-

ous diseases. As a mostly Latino population, farmworkers are particularly susceptible to diabetes. Diabetes, along with tuberculosis, hypertension, cancer, and HIV, require careful monitoring and follow-up both by the patient him or herself and by a health care worker. Even if the money can be found, this kind of attention is not likely when the worker is a migrant.

A list of chronic health problems

On top of these problems come the problems that arise from the arduous conditions of field work itself.

Musculoskeletal disorders. In 1995 a NIOSH panel determined that the two top priorities for improving farmworkers' on-the-job conditions were musculoskeletal disorders — sprains and strains — and conditions caused by pesticides. Backaches and pain in the shoulders, arms and hands are the most common ailments farmworkers report, and also the top two reasons they become disabled. Much field work is stoop labor, with the worker literally bent double. Workers must kneel frequently, often carry heavy weights in awkward positions, work with their arms above shoulder level, and perform repetitive movements, such as cutting, with their hands and wrists. Sometimes the whole body is subject to vibration from farm equipment. One out of four farmworkers works piece rate, which is an incentive to work fast without stopping. And farmworkers are not covered by the federal law requiring time-and-a-half pay for overtime, so long hours exacerbate the effects of high-stress repetitive motion.

In some other industries that are prone to repetitive strain injuries, unions — or workers comp costs — have forced employers to reengineer work procedures or redesign tools. Farm employers have no such incentive. Labor is cheap and replacements are plentiful.

Pesticide-related illnesses include

'We are treated like slaves'

In June 1999, at the peak of the cucumber harvest, the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) sent a delegation to four North Carolina labor camps associated with the Mt. Olive Pickle Company. Mt. Olive is the target of an organizing drive and boycott by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (FLOC). The delegation talked with Mexican men employed under the government's H-2A "guestworker" program, which allows about 20,000 farmworkers to work temporarily and legally in this country, and also with undocumented workers.

One H-2A grower told the NFWM delegates that his workers had harvested cucumbers from 6 a.m. till 6 p.m. that day, although on some days they worked only 10 hours, others 14. In their 12-hour day, the crew of 16 had picked 35 boxes of cucumbers, each box weighing a thousand pounds. Each worker had picked well over a ton of cucumbers. This considerate grower asked the delegates not to keep the workers up too late. He also mentioned that he'd like to see the workers pay part of the cost of their housing. He was resentful that other, non-H-2A growers right down the road got away with providing shabbier living conditions.

This housing, home to undocumented workers, was run-down and crowded. The delegates described a 10 x 11 foot room with walls painted black, holding four cots with misshapen bedsprings, about 18 inches apart. There was no room for other furniture, though crates and buckets were brought in for chairs. In one house, the windows consisted of shutters and screens, no glass. Electricity was not always available.

Some workers were hesitant to speak

with the visitors, but others complained of their low pay and their complete dependence on their crewleader, the "coyote" who had brought them from Mexico to North Carolina. The coyote charged \$1,500 for the trip — 44 men in a truck — and was deducting the amount in installments from workers' paychecks. The workers expected to be in debt to him for about two years.

For picking cucumbers that would be made into Mt. Olive brand pickles, these workers received 60-65 cents per five-gallon bucket, a rate which had not increased in three years. At the grading station, a bucket sold for 80-85 cents — the crewleader kept the difference. They had been promised 28-40 hours of work a week, but because the grower hadn't had much work for them in the "off-peak" season before the harvest, they had averaged instead only 20-28 hours.

Because these were not H-2A workers, nine percent of their pay went for Social Security and taxes. Each paid \$45 a week to the crewleader for food — two meals a day, mostly rice and beans. They paid extra for coffee, drinks and pastries. During the work day they were off an hour, unpaid, for lunch, and two 15-minute breaks. Asked if they had any outside contacts or activities, they said no, it is either work or *la casa*, although they did point to a volleyball net they had strung up outside. It was an isolated area, with no transportation available. One worker said, "The reality is that we are treated like slaves. I think dogs are treated better than we are."

These workers had had little or no contact with FLOC's union drive. All agreed that it would be very hard for them to complain about conditions for fear of

blacklisting (one worker emphasized this by "slitting" his throat with his thumbnail). While they talked, a man began pacing back and forth outside the room, peering through the screen and at one point calling inside, "We are here to work!" The workers said that this was the crewleader's brother.

A few weeks later, near Raleigh, N.C., a Latino migrant worker collapsed in the 98-degree heat. He was admitted to the hospital with a body temperature of 108, and later died. The hospital's chief of emergency medicine said several farmworkers had been admitted to the intensive care unit. "I don't want to see any more people with brain damage," said Dr. Kathleen Clem. "It's so preventable, it's tragic."

FLOC organizers say that cucumber pickers in North Carolina are regularly kept in fields through the heat of the afternoon. Because cucumbers mature rapidly when it's hot and humid, the growers tell harvesters to work faster when it's hot. They report one grower for Mt. Olive, Ken Murray, who "doesn't give the workers any water breaks, and when he does give water it doesn't have any ice, and if they want cold water, they have to pay for the ice."

On July 15 some of Murray's workers decided to stop working rather than risk heat stroke; he called the North Carolina Growers' Association, which sent an employee to threaten them. "The workers told us," said the FLOC organizers, "that they didn't care if they did get sent back to Mexico, because they couldn't work more that day."

Along with other agribusiness companies, Mt. Olive has signed a letter to Congresspeople urging them to adopt a new "guestworker" bill. — J.S.

dermatitis, cancer, eye injuries, and respiratory diseases. Don Villarejo, Ph.D., and Sherry Baron, M.D., write in *Occupational Medicine State of the Art Reviews*, "Although a great deal of research has been conducted on the toxicology and health effects of pesticides in general, few of these studies have been directed at the hired farmworker population" — the population most exposed to pesticides. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 300,000 farmworkers suffer acute pesticide poisoning each year. A mid-1990s survey found that only 30 percent of those who mixed or applied pesticides could read English well. Under rules only implemented in 1995, the EPA requires pesticide training programs, a time lapse between spraying and workers' re-entering fields, and decontamination washing facilities.

But Mike Ferner of FLOC says, "The EPA caved in to the industry on pesticide 'drift' and did not require that adjacent fields and labor camps be notified of spraying." Asked about enforcement of existing rules on non-union farms, Ferner's only response is a rude noise.

At Salinas' camp, the fields come right up to the workers' back doors. Her husband, who is in charge of applying pesticides, always tells the camp residents to stay inside when he is going to spray. But some exposure is inevitable, and for a long time, the camp had only one shower for men and one for women. "During the season we were up till one o'clock in the morning taking a shower," says Salinas. The workers successfully badgered the state housing inspector to make the farmer add more showers.

The Institute for Southern Studies, in a July 1999 report, "Uprooting Injustice," notes that the state of North Carolina employs only seven pesticide field inspectors, none of whom speaks Spanish. In the first nine months of 1998, they inspected 451 farms certified for "re-

stricted use" pesticides. At this rate, ISS notes, it will take 43 years to visit the 26,000 such growers in North Carolina.

Traumatic injuries. Agriculture has the third highest occupational fatality rate (owners and workers combined), after coal mining and fishing.

Respiratory disease. A 1988 study found reduced lung capacity among tomato and citrus workers in California and surmised that the cause could be silicates in the soil or pesticides such as paraquat.

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Skin diseases. Agricultural workers have the highest incidence of skin disorders of all industrial classifications, twice as high as manufacturing workers.

Tuberculosis. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that farmworkers have a six-fold greater risk of TB than the general population of working adults. One reason is crowded living conditions.

HIV. Studies have found HIV-positive rates among migrants eight to 32 times higher than the national average.

Slave-labor bill?

The worst conditions will become more common if growers have their way in Congress. The National Council of Agricultural Employers is pushing a bill to bring up to 350,000 "guestworkers" per year into the country, under a government-sponsored program that farmworker advocates call "legalized slavery." The growers claim a shortage of farm labor. Many studies, however, including a 1997 review by the Government Accounting Office (GAO), document a surplus of

farmworkers, as evidenced by the steady decline of their wages.

The growers' other argument for bringing in foreign workers is that Americans just won't take such hard jobs. New America News Service points out: "Americans do all sorts of tough, dirty seasonal work, laying asphalt on highways, mining coal, roofing in 100-plus-degree weather, constructing buildings. The difference is that these jobs pay much better and usually offer benefits that everyone other than farm workers takes for granted."

The proposed law, which some Representatives called a "de facto slave-labor program," would not require growers to provide housing and transportation, as under the current, more limited program ("H-2A" — see sidebar). Instead, workers would get a housing stipend — \$125 a month in Oregon, for example. Individual workers would no longer be entitled to the minimum wage — companies could pay workers as a group that averaged the minimum.

The GAO concluded that such a bill would result in the firing of tens of thousands of current workers as growers replaced them with even cheaper ones.

A similar bill was voted down in 1998. But farm employers will doubtless continue seeking to hire cheap foreign labor without the inconvenience of relocating abroad. In an interview with New America News Service, a Georgia onion grower who employs H-2A workers said, "If we had a bunch of American workers, we'd have to hire someone like a personnel director to deal with the problems. The people we have now, they come to work. They don't have kids to pick up from school or take to the doctor. They don't have child support issues. They don't ask to leave early for this and that. They don't call in sick. If you say to them, 'Today we need to work for 10 hours,' they don't say anything."

TW

Suing sweatshops

Global Exchange has filed lawsuits against U.S. garment manufacturers for false claims of "no sweatshop" policies and misleading labels.

"When the Gap uses the label that says 'Made in Mariana Islands U.S.A.' they are clearly trying to mislead consumers into believing that the garment is made by American workers protected by U.S. labor laws," Medea Benjamin, co-director of Global Exchange, writes.

"Saipan is an island in the Northern Marianas which American gained control of after World War II. It is ironic that an island thousands of American men died on, fighting to free it from tyranny, is now the site of sweatshops where thousands are practically enslaved.

"Last year, an estimated \$1 billion worth of wholesale so-called "Made in the U.S.A." clothing was made in sweatshops on the island of Saipan by workers who are lured by false claims of high wages and 'American-style' living, only to be paid slave wages, suffer constant risk of injury or death from unsafe working conditions, and be housed in overcrowded barracks surrounded by barbed wire.

"Workers must stay on the job in order to pay off exorbitant recruitment fees — often as much as \$7,000 — that are a precondition of their employment. Unilaterally determined costs for food and housing of up to \$200 a month is also deducted from their paychecks.

"Since they are forced to work for about \$3.00 an hour, these workers may need to work up to 2,500 hours just to break even. The effect is to keep workers in a state where their wages may be less than the payments owed for their debts.

"Workers have been threatened with violence or deportation when they report violations of safety or human rights laws. Retribution is also threatened against their families in their home countries, who often are without resources or influence."

Contact Global Exchange, 2017 Mission St., Room 303, San Francisco, CA 94110; <www.globalexchange.org>.

Jury acquits anti-nuclear activists

Eight anti-nuclear activists who blocked traffic at Bangor Nuclear Submarine Base on Aug. 9, 1998, were found not guilty of disorderly conduct by a jury this past June.

The defendants presented an international law defense based on the Hague Convention of 1907, the Nuremberg Principles and the 1996 World Court ruling on the illegality of nuclear weapons. District Court Judge James Riehl, in his instructions to the jury, told them to take into account the fact that international treaties supercede local, state and federal laws.

On Aug. 9 of this year (the 54th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki), activists returned to the base with a banner reading, "Bangor Closed — Trident violates International Law." After blocking incoming traffic for a short time, four protesters were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

The protests, organized by the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, have focused specifically on stopping a proposed nuclear missile upgrade at Bangor.

U.S. funding Colombian paramilitaries

"Drug war" money sent to Colombia is financing right-wing paramilitary activity on a massive scale, according to Amnesty International's 1999 report.

"You are unwittingly complicitous in some of the worst mass murders in the hemisphere today," Amnesty's Carlos Salinas told *The Progressive* (Sept. 1999). "If you liked El Salvador, you're going to love Columbia. It's the same death squads, the same military aid, and the same whitewash from Washington.

"The Colombian police and military are not fighting a drug war," a *Progressive* editorial states, reporting that the Administration is considering an additional \$1 billion in emergency aid primarily for Colombia (already the third largest

recipient of U.S. military aid in the world). "They are fighting an old-fashioned civil war against leftwing rebels who are gaining strength. This is the emergency the Pentagon worries about — not drugs. Colombia is strategically located, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. And it has vast oil and mineral reserves that multinational corporations have been exploiting for years, often under the armed guard of the Colombian military."

"More than 1,000 civilians were killed [in 1998] by the security forces or paramilitary groups operating with [U.S. military] support or acquiescence," the 1999 Amnesty report says. "Many were tortured before being killed. At least 150 people 'disappeared.' Human rights activists were threatened and attacked; at least six were killed."

War tax resistance

The 8th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns will be held in Wash., D.C. July 6-9, 2000. This will be the first such conference held in the U.S. Previous conferences were held in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Spain, England and India. The conference will take place on the campus of the Catholic University of America. All those interested in issues related to the conscientious objection to military taxation are invited to join the gathering.

For details and registration information, contact the Peace Tax Foundation, 2121 Decatur Place, NW, Wash., D.C. 20008, 202-483-3751. Registration must be made by the end of 1999 to guarantee a place at the conference.

Short takes

‘Food. Health. Hope.’: Monsanto, the transgenetic revolution and ethics

by Donella Meadows

Corporate demonizing will not transform industrial agriculture, but less hubris and more openness to organic agriculture might help.

Last fall at a prestigious environmental forum in San Francisco the small group of terrorists who throw gooey pies in the faces of offensive corporate executives pulled off a direct hit on Monsanto’s CEO, Bob Shapiro. The pie was made of tofu, in protest against the company’s genetically engineered soybeans.

In India, there’s an uprising going on under the name “Operation Cremate Monsanto.” People are torching the company’s test plots of genetically modified cotton.

In England, protesters pull up plots of transgenic potatoes and corn. In other EU countries and Japan, there are energetic political movements to ban gene-spliced foods altogether.

In Canada, Monsanto sent Pinkerton detectives out to do DNA tests on canola crops, and maintained a hotline so farmers could turn in neighbors for keeping and replanting gene-spliced seed, rather than buying it each year from the company as their contracts require. Outraged farmers claimed that Monsanto’s patented genes appeared in their fields not through replanting, but through

pollen from neighboring fields.

American consumers, Monsanto claims, have accepted gene-spliced foods — but the company must know better, because it fights aggressively against any labeling for gene-spliced products. In a recent *Time* magazine poll 81 percent of respondents said transgenic foods should be labeled; 58 percent said they wouldn’t buy them.

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Sincere desire to offer hope

The transgenetic revolution has engulfed agriculture with unbelievable speed. As of 1996, virtually no transgenic crops had been planted. In 1997 they covered 19 million acres. In that year, more than half the world’s soybeans and one-third of the corn contained genes pasted in from other forms of life.

Isn’t that great? say Monsanto scientists, several of whom I know and like. Pesticide-containing potatoes can be grown with fewer harmful sprays. (But not with no sprays, because, so

far, the spliced potato can only fend off one of its many pests.)

Soybeans engineered to resist Monsanto’s herbicide, Roundup, can grow in uncultivated fields, the weeds controlled by the herbicide. There’s no need to turn the soil, so there’s less tractor fuel used and less erosion.

The Monsanto folks honestly see themselves as helping to feed the world. “Food. Health. Hope.” is their new company motto. They have taken a public stand for environmental sustainability. They’re working hard to cut their toxic emissions and fossil-fuel consumption. Many of them are sincere; this is more than a public-relations ploy. So it’s especially maddening to those of us who also want the world fed and the environment sustained to see this company get pie in its face, literally and figuratively, again and again, and to deserve it.

Like every big organization, Monsanto’s right hand doesn’t always know what its left hand is doing I’m told that corporate headquarters found out about the spying in the canola fields of Canada only when the story hit the press, and has now put a stop to it.

A culture of power and desperation

Monsanto has other problems. One is a culture of power, common throughout the corporate world — a habit of imposing the company’s will on others and on nature, a habit of not listening to people and/or not respecting them. Of assuming, for instance, that if people don’t want to eat genetically engineered

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food, they must be ignorant. Assuming that a few million bucks' worth of reassuring ads will bring them around.

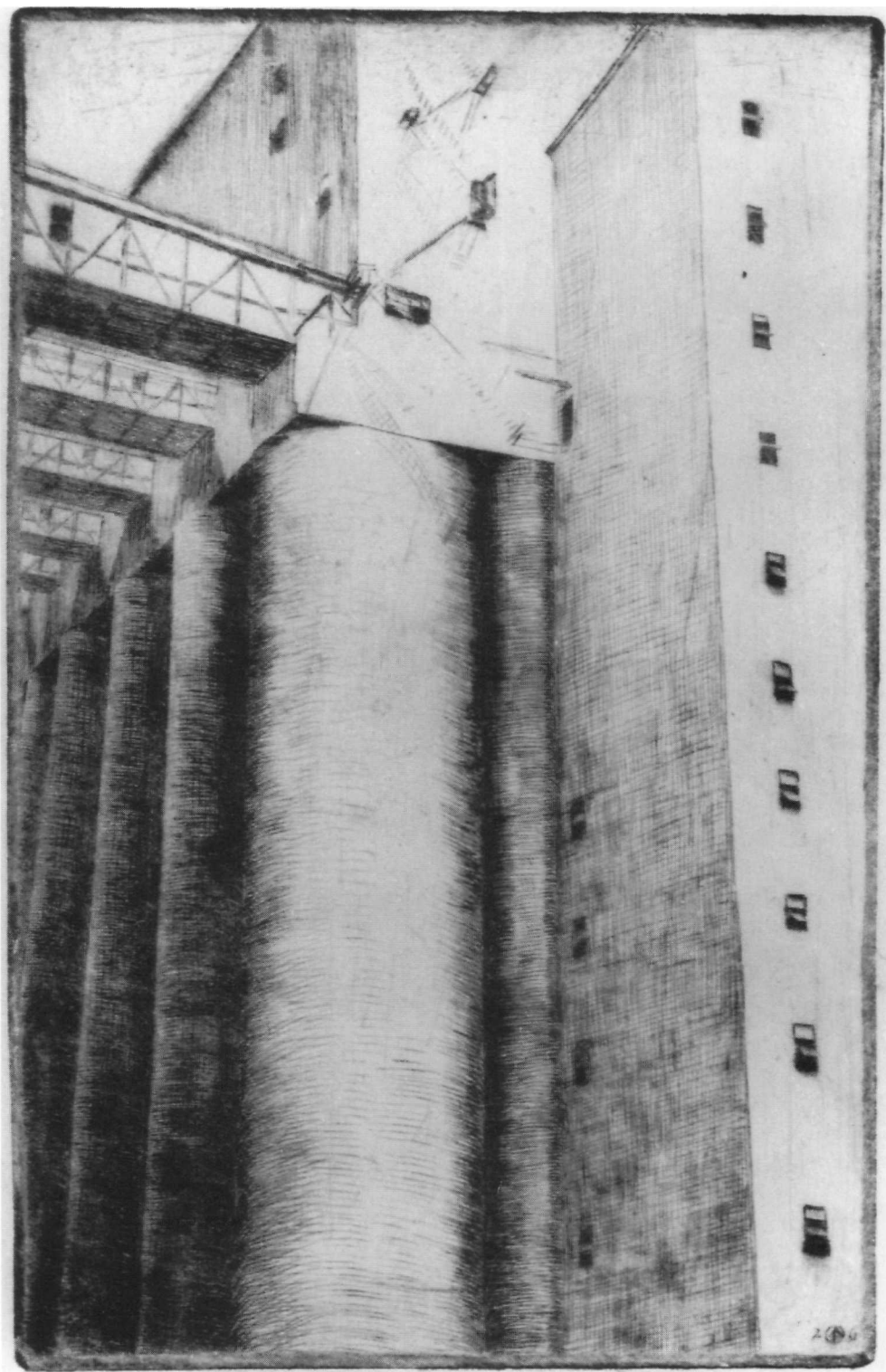
Other problems are particular to Monsanto: a defensiveness (that derives, I suppose, from a nasty environmental history), and a desperation, because CEO Bob Shapiro has bet the company on genetic engineering, and the bet is a long way from paying off.

Narrow expertise. A size that makes coordination and thoroughgoing integrity impossible. Power wielded with arrogance. Defensiveness edging toward desperation. I'm not sure whether any human organization should "own" the codes for life, manipulate them at will, and spread the results throughout nature on a massive scale. But if one should, I wouldn't choose an organization with Monsanto's characteristics for the role.

A question of ethics

My most fundamental reason for viewing Monsanto's corporate direction with concern is ethical. It is one I can hardly articulate, because it's the philosophical, gut-level instinct that made me an organic grower in the first place. It is so hard to talk about worldviews. It's like trying to see the lenses of one's own eyes, trying to bite one's own teeth, trying to explain one's language without using that language. It has to do with what is proper and improper for people to do to other living things.

But here's the best I can do in expressing where I'm coming from. I love science and rationality but I hate the basic premises of the industrial revolution. Donald Worster, in his 1988



Grain Elevator No. 3, 1926, by Werner Drewes

book, *The Ends of the Earth*, describes those premises this way:

"The capitalists ... promised that, through the technological domination of the earth, they could deliver a more fair, rational, efficient and productive life for everyone. ... People must ... think constantly in terms of making money. They must regard everything around them — the land, its natural resources, their own labor — as potential commodities that might fetch a profit in the market. They must demand the right to produce, buy and sell those commodities without outside regulation or interference."

All agriculture involves forcing human will onto natural ecosystems. But organic agriculture is at least about doing so from a position of respect for what nature does and how it does it. It's about learning from nature, dancing in harmony with it; using natural forces with gratitude and for generous purposes, to further the health of people and ecosystems. At least so far, organic growing is based on interaction, caution, humility. [N.B. The globalization of organic agriculture, however, is posing concerns. See "Organic Incorporated," in *Whole Earth* No. 92.]

Chemical agriculture, monoculture, big-time farming, global markets, money calculated in millions and billions, all that stuff looks like hubris, greed, way too much power administered with way too much self-confidence despite a historic trail of grievous damage to people and to nature. Genetic engineering looks like more of the same, ratcheted up one more step in power, and therefore in danger.

Good intentions, reckless system
The funny thing is, the people who do it, in my experience, aren't greedy, aren't reckless, aren't arrogant. When I asked my Monsanto friend whether, in

engineering his potato, he felt like he was playing God, he smiled — he's a gentle person — and said, no, it just felt like he was going to the lab and working on challenging scientific puzzles. I believe him; that's his passion, a passion I once shared, and one that can indeed serve generous purposes, furthering the health of people and ecosystems.

But as we have learned over and over (as science should have learned from the atomic bomb, if nothing else), one has to be aware of the purposes, overt and latent, of the larger systems within which one works. Monsanto isn't uniquely bad, as its critics claim it to be. The system of which it's a part — industrialism, capitalism — isn't uniquely bad either. (Consider, as we all said in the Cold War days, the alternative.) But the industrial/corporate system is, we all know, reckless, proud, driven by a never-satisfied need for more, more, more and apparently unable to learn from its historic trail of

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grievous damage to people and to nature.

"I guess you don't care if people starve," said a biologist I deeply respect, an environmental hero, who is fervently in favor of genetic engineering. He constantly accuses me of wanting to go back to the low-yield, tiny-farm agriculture of a century ago.

A paradigm gap

I tell the genetic-engineering proponents that there are alternatives to industrial agriculture, with its monocultures generating the hordes of pests that necessitate the pesticides. I show them data from organic farms getting yields as good as their chemical-doused neighbors. I point out that there is already enough food to feed the world, that hunger could be ended by sharing that food, and/or by sharing technologies that can raise lots of food without poisoning the earth and without invading the genomes that nature has evolved. I don't think this information even reaches their auditory nerves, much less their brains.

This kind of extreme failure even to hear an argument, much less process it, alerts me that this is not a rational discussion at all, not on either side, mine either. This is a paradigm gap, a worldview argument, a disagreement about morals and values and the deepest, most fundamental assumptions about how the world works.

Some people of my worldview would ban genetic engineering altogether as an act of hubris as extreme and dangerous as the development of the atomic bomb. I wouldn't go that far. Heck, I was trained as a molecular biologist. I think this is cool science, which could lead us to understand so much; to have, within my worldview, even deeper respect for the biosphere in which, somehow, staggeringly, all life evolved — including (and not ending with) one

Seven reasons for rejecting a potato

"Why won't you grow my potatoes?" a puzzled Monsanto scientist asked me. His bioengineered potatoes carry a gene spliced in from a bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), which parasitizes a number of insect larvae. One strain of Bt is particularly fond of the relentless Colorado potato beetle.

In nature, Bt lurks in the soil and gets splashed up onto, say, potato leaves. If a beetle grub ingests Bt while chomping on a leaf, the bacterium multiplies in its gut. Within hours, thousands of Bt offspring have produced a specific toxin that kills the grub. Then the bacteria, having feasted on the grub's dissolved innards, pour out of its body. Not pretty, just nature at work. A potato beetle is Bt's way of making more Bt.

Maybe once or twice a growing season, organic farmers like me spray Bt to control potato beetles if grubs get out of hand — which they don't always do, because we never plant acres and acres of continuous potatoes. We rotate crops to keep these pests from building up. We don't need much Bt, especially since it's alive; once we've applied it, it reproduces itself for a while, until it can't find any more grubs.

Now comes Monsanto, snipping out the gene that tells Bt how to make that specific beetle toxin and sticking that gene into the Russet Burbank potato, the most widely grown potato in the world, the one that supplies all the fast-food fries. The spliced potato, trademarked NewLeaf, makes the toxin constantly in small amounts in every one of its cells.

My friend at Monsanto honestly sees this potato as a wonderful advance, saving organic farmers the trouble of spraying Bt and conventional farmers the danger of spraying beetle-cides. He can't

understand why I wouldn't welcome it with praise and rejoicing and use it on my organic farm.

Sigh. The reasons seem so obvious to me. In order of increasing seriousness they are:

1. **FOOD SAFETY.** When I spray Bt on my potatoes, its poison gets made only within the guts of beetle grubs. If it gets out onto the potato leaves when the grubs die and dissolve, it quickly washes away. The NewLeaf potato bears the toxin in every cell, even in the tubers we eat. We can't wash it out. The entire plant is a pesticide.

2. **COMPANY GOOFS.** Monsanto revealed recently (and quietly) that huge quantities of another of its biotech prod-

Biotech companies love to talk about feeding the world, but their products must pay off in a market that measures dollar demand, not human need.

ucts, a gene-spliced canola seed, had been mistakenly sold with the wrong gene in it, one that had not been tested or licensed. The problem here is not that companies make mistakes — of course they do — and not that the unlicensed canola gene was necessarily dangerous. The problem is that genetic engineering, like nuclear power, is not an arena where we want mistakes to be made.

3. **PEST RESISTANCE.** Whenever a pest comes in contact with a poison, it's possible that a few members of its fast-breeding horde can survive, because they bear some genetic trait that allows them to detoxify, avoid, or defuse the poison. Those

resistant pests are the ones that live to produce the next generation. The Colorado potato beetle is second only to the green peach aphid in its acquired resistance to hard-core pesticides. But it has never developed resistance to Bt. Organic farmers haven't blown Bt's cover, because they use it spottily and on the surface of the leaves.

But fields of potatoes carrying Bt toxin inside every leaf during the whole growing season are something new under the sun. I can't imagine a more perfect setup to select for resistance. The Diamondback moth, for instance, is already resistant to Bt's gut assaults. Experts, including Monsanto's own, estimate it will take five to 10 years before the NewLeaf potato will destroy both its own effectiveness and that of a good organic-crop-protection tool as well.

You might wonder why Monsanto would develop a product that is almost certain to render itself impotent. I wondered too, until I came across this quote from a company spokesman: "Resistance is unlikely to happen within five years, and within that time frame we'll offer new technology that will further reduce the likelihood of resistance." Don't worry. We'll destroy nature's tool for beetle control, but you can always come to us for a new one. It will even be a better one. Trust us.

4. **FURTHER CONSEQUENCES IN NATURE.** In 1996, Danish scientists watched a gene for herbicide resistance in canola jump the farm fence to enter one of canola's wild relatives. Will the ability to make beetle toxin suddenly show up in, say, wild nightshade, which is a relative of the potato? Or could resistant beetles, no longer held in check by Bt, become more effective pests to other members of the nightshade family

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(which includes tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants)?

Another possibility is that cut-and-paste genes will travel via the very viruses that the gene splicers use to do their work. Viruses are routinely used as carriers to insert genes into the target cell of the potato or sheep or whatever. Wild viruses may — no one knows — be more likely to pick up a transplanted gene than a native gene. If a cut-and-paste gene has been engineered to fight a virus, that virus (if the gene fails to destroy it) or another one could acquire and spread the gene.

And then there's the already demonstrated food-chain effect. Aphids in Scotland ate Bt potatoes; when the "good guys" — lacewings and ladybugs — ate the aphids, they died from gut upset.

Once a gene has been loosed, it's way beyond our recall or can only be recalled through a massively expensive mobilization of people and resources (think of the smallpox virus).

5. "JUNK" DNA. Genetic technology sounds like a precise science, but in fact it's primitive and messy. It doesn't matter whether plants are sexually crossed; or seeds are radiated or chemically induced to mutate; or genes are inserted into cell tissue; or chromosomes are shot with new genes by a micro-gun. No one is quite sure where the genes will go, how they will glom on to the chromosome, what sequences of "junk" DNA (meaning DNA that scientists can't see any use for) may come along with the desirable genes, or how the "junk" DNA may influence the cell. What outcomes might there be from this fairly random and uncontrolled process? No one — no scientist, no regulator, no activist hyping these threats, no gene-splicer making light of them — really has the slightest idea.

6. BREAKING THE SPECIES BAR-

RIER. Nature doesn't normally cut and paste single genes from bacteria to potatoes, toads to petunias, people to sheep. Though the DNA of a sunflower is essentially made of the same stuff as that of a chimpanzee, numerous physical, behavioral, and biological barriers prevent their specific genes from creeping, swimming, or leaping into each other's DNA. Contrary to the claims of biotech companies and consistent with the intuition of everyone else, the various critters within which nature packages various lengths and combinations of DNA do have some boundaries, which presumably have some evolutionary value. Moving single genes from any species to any other is not just a small extension of the age-old human practice of breeding roses or cattle. It's a whole new twist.

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7. THE PACE AND THE SELECTION MECHANISM. For several billion years evolution has proceeded in fits and starts, but generally slowly. In the hands of biotechnicians, farmers and breeders, the rate of evolution speeds up enormously, and species are selected by their ability to fit not into nature, but into markets.

From a systems point of view these are two of the most profound interventions one can make in a system. Speeding up the rate of change relative to the rate of corrective feedback means a system can't manage itself, nor can it be managed. If there are terrible consequences from even one of our imaginative gene-tinkerings, we are un-

likely to find out about it in time to cleanse nature of our mistake. We are not helping this problem by conducting our genetic-manipulation experiments in corporate secrecy, overseen by underfunded and politically compromised regulatory agencies, nor by putting these corporations under such stress from stock-market expectations that they must roll out their experiments by the millions of acres over just a few years.

Even more profound than destabilizing a system by changing it faster than its feedback mechanisms can function is derailing it by setting an entirely different goal around which those feedback mechanisms can "true." For billions of years nature selected species survival according to the ability to thrive and reproduce in the physical environment and in the presence of all neighboring species. For 10,000 years, farmers have selected for what can be manipulated by people in order to feed people. Now the criterion is what can be patented and sold in huge, global-market quantities.

Biotech companies love to talk about feeding the world, but their products must pay off in a market that measures dollar demand, not human need. By far the greatest effort has gone into the potato that makes fast-food fries, not the yam grown by folks with no cash. The corn that feeds America's pigs and chickens, not the dryland millet that feeds Africa's children. The diseases of the rich, not the plagues of the poor. There is some public funding and corporate charity directed toward gene manipulations that might conceivably help feed the world, but the vast majority of minds and bucks are working on caffeine-free coffee beans, designer tomatoes, seedless watermelons. They always will, if the market is the guide.

— Donella H. Meadows

critter that actually has the ability to begin to understand the very genetic, evolutionary processes that produced its own species.

I wouldn't stop genomic and tissue-culture science. I would probably, with great dare, go along with some commercial applications of the science. I can't see any problem, for example, with the use of gene-spliced bacteria in vats, turning out inexpensive insulin for diabetics — though I'd want to know how the spent vats are emptied into nature. Some day I would hope gene-repair therapies could ease a lot of human suffering. I would hope we would never use this technology to design our kids or our crops.

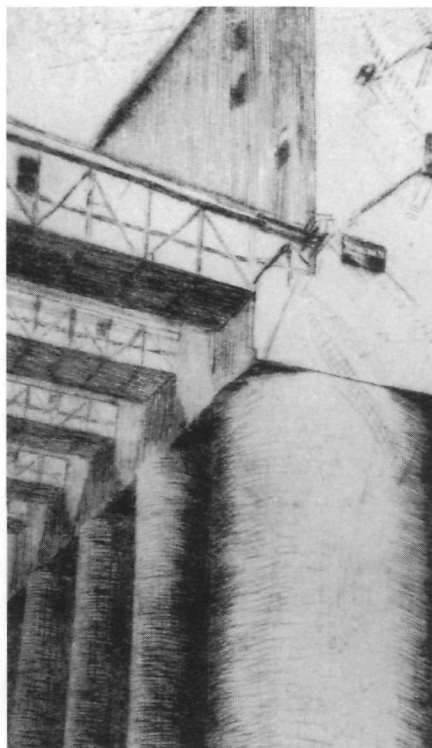
The whole public — and nothing but

But I shouldn't be the one to choose; that's my main point. Nor should poor Monsanto. Nor should the frightened Monsanto- demonizers.

Gene-manipulation decisions are more than present-day life or death; they are long-term-future life or death — they determine the course of evolution. The decisions (including "ownership" of the genes and/or technologies) should be firmly in the hands of the most knowledgeable and ethical people we can find. For that role I nominate the public, the whole public, and nothing but the public.

Should you think the public an inadequate safeguard, let me share some genetic-technology guidelines recently formulated by a group selected to represent "average" Australian citizens:

1. Regulation should be developed by a Gene Technology Organization (GTO), a statutory authority with well-balanced representation and commercially significant sanctions. Its deliberations should be public.



2. No new commercial releases or unlabeled importation of genetically modified foods (either whole or processed) should be permitted until a) the GTO is in place, b) a clear Australian position on the Biosafety Protocol has been established, and c) an all-encompassing labelling system has been introduced.

3. Decisions by any regulatory body should take into account more than just science. The overriding principles when drafting legislation should be the environment and the physical, mental, and social health of individuals.

4. Australia should support a regulated and precautionary approach to trade in relation to GMOs [Genetically Modified Organisms].

5. Environment and Health Departments should develop strategies to prepare for any health or environmental problems from GMOs — for example, an adverse-reactions register.

6. Independent assessment of the viability and impacts of choosing non-GMO options should be carried out, and this information communicated to the public.

7. Ethicists should be included in all GMO policy-making.

8. There should be an inquiry by the ACCC (Consumer and Competition Commission) into multinational monopolies in the food industry.

9. Government should embrace a commitment to bring together all stakeholders to reach agreement on mutually beneficial solutions, rather than the way different interests now compete to lobby government.

I'd suggest even stronger safeguards, at least until my own government finds its way back from plutocracy to democracy, but I consider that Australian draft a better start than anything I've heard from Monsanto, or from anyone else. **TW**

WISHING YOU HAD HELD ON TO THAT OLD ISSUE OF THE WITNESS?

The topics explored in the pages of *The Witness* seldom go out of date. And study groups interested in a particular issue are likely to find a number of back issues which pertain. We still have copies available for most back issues. To order, send a check for \$3 per copy ordered to *The Witness*, 7000 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210-2872. To charge your back issue to Visa or Mastercard, call (313) 841-1967, or fax (313) 841-1956.

What's in the choice of a Thanksgiving turkey?

by Jane Lamb

To “talk turkey,” says one dictionary definition, is to speak frankly; to get down to business. Turkey in this country is certainly business, in a big way. About 300 million turkeys are raised in the U.S. each year, according to the National Turkey Federation (NTF). But are they all alike? A quick perusal of the poultry cases at the supermarket reveals a variety of choices and prices to ponder. A stop at the local health food store or farmers’ market adds further possibilities to the list. Which turkey is the best to buy for your Thanksgiving table and why?

The National Turkey Federation represents for the most part the huge “conventional” producers who process as many as 70,000 birds per day for an average 99 cents per pound. Frozen supermarket turkeys average 10 cents less per pound than fresh. The holiday season brings supermarket turkeys down to as low as 59 cents — actually a loss leader that is made up for by the price of stove-top stuffing, cranberries and all the rest of the special occasion goodies. These prices are the result, the NTF points out, of “technical advances in turkey genetics, production and processing [which] have created a turkey that produces a pound of meat while using a smaller amount of feed and in less time, than most other domestic

meat-producing animals.” Modern turkeys are bred to have more breast meat and meatier thighs than their wild ancestors.

On the other end of the scale are the small, local growers of “free-range” turkeys (birds that spend much of their life in outdoor pastures), costing \$1.85 and more per pound. Interestingly, the holiday, free-range turkey prices go up at the health food store, a basic, supply-and-demand factor. As nutrition-

The term “no hormones added” cannot be used on a label unless it also states that federal law prohibits the use of hormones.

However, antibiotics, which are allowed, are widely used as growth promoters.

and-environment-conscious consumers are proving more and more willing to pay the extra price for “organic” vittles, it is not surprising that the market for free-range, locally grown turkeys (and chickens) is keeping pace. Ounce per ounce, free-range birds have 2 percent more breast meat than conventional turkeys and 20 percent less fat, according to *The Green Guide* (published by Mothers and Others, New York, N.Y.). Turkeys develop their frames first and put on weight toward the end of their short lives — six to eight months, depending on the breed. Free-range tur-

keys are bred to grow for the longer period and have more time to develop meat after their bone structure is established.

Few “organic” turkeys

Let it be said at the outset: Very few free-range turkeys are organically raised, for a number of reasons. On the federal level, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been wrestling with a national standard accurately defining the term “organic” since Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. At present, the USDA will permit the use of the term “organic” on the label of a meat or poultry product only if it is accompanied by a factual statement that the product has been “certified organic” by a certifying entity other than the USDA. Definitions vary from state to state, but those of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), one of the leaders in the quest for a national standard, are among the most comprehensive.

Bob Neal raises close to 4,000 birds a year at The Turkey Farm in New Sharon, Me., the only large producer of 100-percent free-range turkeys in the state. He cites two major barriers to MOFGA “organic” certification. First, organically grown feed is practically unavailable and definitely not at a cost-effective price. In order to survive, turkey poults (chicks) must be protected from the parasite coccidiosis. The only preventions MOFGA will allow is vaccination of individual birds by a veterinarian or raising turkeys on wire so they can’t pick up the disease from the ground.

“No vet in Maine will do it,” Neal says, “and raising turkeys on wire damages their legs. They develop weak joints and that becomes an animal welfare question.” He treats his young birds

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with Aprozolium, a non-antibiotic parasiticide, to prevent coccidiosis, but they receive no other medication, and only drink unchlorinated water.

"I don't think we know much about chlorine, only that it's a very strong chemical," he says.

But it's not impossible to obtain an organically raised turkey if you live in the right place. Charlotte Young and Jim Baranski may be typical of dedicated growers in other states. They raise about 50 MOFGA-certified turkeys a season (as well as chickens and

laying hens) at Shalom Farm in Franklin, Me. They meet the standards, Young explains, by feeding only organic grain (from Vermont Organic Grain Co.) and using no medication, even for coccidiosis. Young learned from a veterinarian that coccidiosis is always present to some degree on a farm and to wipe it out completely prevents animals from developing resistance. Turkeys are the most difficult

birds to get started, but absolute monitoring of temperature before they are feathered out and ready to go outdoors is more important than medication, she has found. Turkey mortality rate is higher than for other birds, but "we figure it into our business plan," she says. Whole certified organic turkeys, all sold locally, go for \$2.25 per pound at the farm and \$2.80 per pound at the nearby Hancock County Organic Grow-

ers Cooperative.

'Natural'

"Natural" is another term found on many turkey labels. The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) stipulates that to be labeled "natural" the product contain no artificial ingredient or added color and be only minimally processed, in a way that does not fundamentally alter the raw product. The use of antibiotics is covered under a separate provision: "The term 'no antibiotics added' may be used on labels ... if sufficient documentation is



Bob Neal of The Turkey Farm in New Sharon, Me., is Maine's largest producer of free-range turkeys. Here a shopper tries a sample of marinated turkey cutlet at his booth at the Brunswick Farmers' Market.

Jane Lamb

provided by the producer." The NFT points out that when FDA-approved antibiotics are used, a withdrawal period is required before the turkey can be slaughtered. FSIS monitors the administration of antibiotics and randomly tests flocks for residues.

"Therefore, consumers can be assured that turkeys do not contain antibiotic residues when they go to market," their literature says.

Growth hormones and feed additives

"Growth hormones" raises a red flag in the minds of many consumers. The USDA prohibits the use of growth hormones in raising poultry. The term "no hormones added" cannot be used on a label unless it also states that federal law prohibits the use of hormones. However, antibiotics, which are allowed, are widely used as growth promoters. "These subtherapeutic doses of antibiotics are suspected of being a major cause of antibiotic resistance,"

Diane Schivera, a technical assistant for MOFGA, has recently argued in "Petition to Preserve the Usefulness of Antibiotics" (*Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener*, 9-11/99). Bacteria which survive antibiotic treatment for disease are the fitter strains and quickly proliferate, rendering that antibiotic ineffectual.

"One strain of salmonella, for

example, is resistant to five of the strongest antibiotics used to treat humans," Shivera points out. England and Denmark have banned the agricultural use of antibiotics used in humans as growth promoters. Shady Brook Farms, a Virginia fresh turkey producer that markets under their own name in the New England supermarket chain, Shop 'n Save (Hannaford Bros.), however, openly states that they add "growth

promotants” to feed and only add antibiotics when necessary due to illness.

Turkeys labeled “self-basted” have been injected with a solution containing butter or other edible fat, broth, stock or water, spices and flavor enhancers. The label must include a statement identifying the total quantity and common name of all such ingredients.

Fresh vs. frozen

The USDA has very strict temperature requirements for fresh and frozen birds. To be designated “fresh,” the turkey’s internal temperature can never have been below 26 F. (This accounts for the ice crystals sometimes found in “fresh” turkeys.) Between 26 F and 0 F the turkey must be labeled “hard-chilled” or “previously hard-chilled.” Frozen turkeys must be kept at a constant 0 F or below from the time of slaughter until purchased by the consumer. Frozen turkeys will keep in the freezer for up to 12 months. Hard-chilled birds should be treated the same way as fresh, according to package directions.

Turkeys are what they eat

Turkeys are usually fed a balanced diet of corn and soybean meal with a standard supplement of vitamins and minerals. (Free-range turkeys get the added benefit of micronutrients in the green vegetation they forage in the field. A common practice is to move turkeys from pasture to pasture, like other livestock in a “rotational grazing” program.) Feed companies will supply producers with special formulas. Bob Neal favors a more complex diet incorporating five grains: soy for protein, corn for energy and fat, canola meal, alfalfa and barley, and no animal byproducts.

“Animal byproducts” are the viscera from slaughterhouses, processed in rendering operations and added to conventional feed to increase fat and protein content. If they come from non-related species such as lamb and beef,

they’re OK, says Neal, adding that no North American breeder would consider using poultry-byproduct feed. “But my clients won’t accept any meat byproducts,” he points out. He has to drive to Connecticut for the feed that meets nutritional requirements of the British United Turkey of America, a bird bred especially for free-range culture.

Bioregionalists frequently point out the costs to consumer and environment of the long haul for both feed and product and the many advantages of almost anything locally produced. Turkey farm owner Bob Neal delivers his free-range turkeys to 23 stores and sells weekly at the Brunswick Farmers Market, all within a 90-mile radius.

Turkeys raised ‘the old-fashioned way’

Ken Charles, fourth-generation owner of the Charles Poultry Company in Lancaster, Pa., raises 3,000 free-range turkeys a year for the holiday market “the old-fashioned way,” he says. “No antibiotics, no animal byproducts, no chemicals in the water and no electricity.” Members of the Dunkards (Church of the Brethren), “somewhere between Amish and Mennonite,” he and his family carry on the business established by his grandfather in the late 1800s, raising and processing poultry in their modern, USDA-approved and inspected plant.

“Our turkeys are hand-fed,” he says. “They’re very selective eaters. Some pick out the corn, some pick out the soybeans. They feed better in the sun, but they can eat in the shade if they want to. We’re very proud to raise turkeys to the highest standard. We market a very special bird,” a local breed that’s a family secret. Charles trucks his turkeys to supermarkets large and small in the New York City area, where regular customers reserve 30 to 40 percent of the birds and the rest are “up for grabs.”

But not all free-range turkeys are produced on small farms. At Misty Knoll Farm in Fairfax, Vt., John Palmer raises 20,000 free-range turkeys (and many more chickens) a year, using no antibiotics or animal byproducts, only corn, soy, vitamins and minerals. He grows his own organic grain, but not enough for his needs, he says. Misty Knoll sells fresh turkeys from June through January, frozen turkeys the rest of the year. About 20 percent are sold locally. A few are shipped as far as California and Texas, but the biggest volume goes to New England and New York markets. Palmer provides fresh turkeys for another big New England supermarket chain, Shaw’s.

Humane treatment?

The NTF is quick to point out that humane treatment of turkeys is critical to the profitability of the industry. “Research shows that birds subjected to stress such as atmospheric conditions, crowding, disease and heat do not gain as much weight or utilize feed as efficiently as their less stressed counterparts.” (There’s a widespread belief, however, that producers who take a factory farm approach to raising turkeys may give the birds something like valium to relieve stress, though we couldn’t confirm this.)

The NFT also states that turkeys

raised by its members are housed in scientifically designed, environmentally controlled barns with room to roam and free access to water, noting that "The National Turkey Federation does not condone mistreatment of turkeys."

Bob Neal notes that his free-range turkeys, which live in a colder climate zone than most, prefer to be outdoors, and only come inside during heavy snow and ice storms.

"They have the choice and they stay outside," he says.

Processing the birds

"The turkey industry provides stable employment for thousands of Americans," says the NFT. "The jobs pay workers with limited education an above-minimum wage and in many cases a full range of employee benefits, including health care. Although modern turkey processing plants are becoming increasingly mechanized, they still depend on skilled labor ... Plant operators value their staffs and strive to create and maintain a clean, safe, [work] environment."

Despite such well-documented cases of serious health and safety violations as those committed by the DeCoster Egg Farms in Turner, Me., a case which is still unresolved, the NFT adds that the poultry industry has for 30 years been proactive in workplace safety, with safety training, ergonomically designed work stations and medical intervention programs.

Shady Brook Farms in Dayton, Va., (more generous with information than other big producers) reports that they employ 1,600 local people in their production plant. "We offer an excellent package of wages and benefits ... health insurance, life insurance, dental and optical insurance, as well as a retirement plan. [We] believe in lifelong learning and we offer 100 percent tuition reimbursement to any employee

who wishes to go to college [as well as] free GED and ESL classes to interested employees."

Shady Brook adds that the turkeys are grown on farms in the Shenandoah Valley within 30 to 40 miles of the processing plant. Individual farmers may hire workers "under their own business arrangement."

At Misty Knoll, John Palmer works with his partner, Rob Litch and three full-time employees. Part-time workers, some of them documented migrants from Jamaica, come to Misty Knoll after the Vermont apple-picking season. "They all have valid green cards and are trained by the Vermont Department of Employment. We have approved living conditions and a guaranteed wage per hour, in the \$7 range, more than the minimum."

Palmer added that USDA inspectors examine every bird processed at Misty Knoll, live and again after slaughter. While this seems within reason for a producer of 20,000 birds a year, it's rather beyond credibility for a company that handles "70,000 to 80,000 birds per day at Carolina Turkey's," in "the world's largest processing plant under one roof," as was proudly — and innocently — revealed by an employee, even if one drops a zero off the figure to get a more conservative 7,000 to 8,000.

Bioregional issues

Bioregionalists frequently point out the costs to consumer and environment of the long haul for both feed and product and the many advantages of almost anything locally produced. Bob Neal, who is licensed to sell only within Maine, delivers to 23 stores and sells weekly at the Brunswick Farmers Market, all within a 90-mile radius. He has to drive to a Cargill outlet in Connecticut at a \$20-per-ton saving over a closer mill in Vermont to pick up his special

feed and makes a 25-hour round trip to Carlisle, Pa. where the price of poult is half that of a nearby New Hampshire supplier, cost-effective though exhausting trips. Shaw's fresh turkeys travel about 200 miles from Vermont to their Massachusetts distribution point and their house label 600 miles from North Carolina. Hannaford's fresh turkeys come 600 miles from Virginia to their Scarborough, Me., warehouse and their frozen ones about 850 miles from the Midwest. This does not include the distances to both chains' retail stores throughout New England. It's about 200 miles from Ken Charles's farm in Lancaster, Pa., to New York City.

As for the other big environmental question, the National Turkey Federation cites 90 percent of Virginia poultry growers in a "voluntary nutrient management plan" (which seems to refer to the prevention of manure runoff into streams and groundwater) and notes that the poultry industry is leading the National Poultry Environmental Dialogue with the USDA Environmental Protection Agency to "develop nationwide pollution control strategies for poultry product." Nothing is said about the disposal of offal (the viscera from slaughtered birds).

Bob Neal composts manure and bedding for his own gardens; offal goes to Living Acres, a nearby compost plant. Misty Knoll composts manure on site to use on their own fields. Viscera goes to a rendering plant in Canada (Fairfax, Vt. is not far from the border) where it is cooked down and used in pet foods and cosmetics.

So what's in the choice of a Thanksgiving turkey? Perhaps, with all the options consumers face — and the economic and environmental impact they represent — it is more important to start talking turkey than ever before.

TW

Plumbing Thanksgiving's 'Untold Story'

by Anne Scheibner

I have recently returned to live in southeastern Connecticut where I grew up and where the English colonial ancestors on my mother's side of my family lived. At the local Episcopal church one of my fellow communicants is Elizabeth Theobald. She is Cherokee on her mother's side of her family and recently moved to this area to become Director of Public Programs for the newly opened Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. Recently we talked about the perspectives we had each inherited about Thanksgiving.

"For native people, every day is a day of thanksgiving," Theobald said. "There are 500 different tribal groups within the U.S. and each one has its own special and unique traditions of celebration. But there is a basic underlying belief that everything is a gift. Giving thanks for everything is simply part of daily life: for water, air, the earth, animals and plants, stars and all living and non-living things including the landscape; for having stories to tell and a family to tell them to. So the idea of Thanksgiving is not a day of specific observance. It is a sense of cultural and personal identity for native people. The gifts of the land are not natural resources, i.e. things to be used or consumed. The Wampanoag's sharing their knowledge of how to raise corn was not just a 'friendly gesture'; it was a sharing of spirituality."

My own assumption about the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving was that, of course, it was the first on this continent. It never occurred to me that native people had been celebrating harvest festivals for thousands of years before the Europeans came and did not

need European help in knowing how to give thanks.

Theobald also noted that Thanksgiving is a popular "Indian time" for us non-native people.

"For three weeks in November, the museum is packed with school tours. It represents the same frustration for us that I've heard a number of black people express about non-black people designating one month as 'Black History Month,' as if that history weren't real and ongoing all year. It's a real dilemma for those of us

How many school children know the reason Squanto knew English?

involved in education: Do we allow ourselves to resent the relegating of Native Americans to background for the Pilgrims and all the stereotypes and myths that go with the non-native story of the 'First Thanksgiving' or do we see the interest during this month as an opportunity to educate?"

Although the gathering at Plymouth may actually have been for treaty making, it had the markings of a harvest festival. Thanksgiving for the Pilgrims and Puritans was typically a religious observance occasioned by specific difficulties or events and marked by prayer and fasting. As one colonist's letter describing a Thanksgiving Day feast during the Revolutionary War mentions, Grandmother Smith on that occasion "did her best to persuade us that it would be better to make it a Day of Fasting & Prayer in view of the Wickedness of our Friends & the Vileness of our Enemies."

Given the textbook illustrations I grew

up with, it never occurred to me that Europeans were in the minority at that 1621 gathering in Plymouth. Massasoit, Sachem of the local Wampanoag tribe, brought 90 braves to that event; the ravages of disease during the winter of 1620-21 had left not more than 50 Pilgrims.

The Pilgrims' contribution to the feast owed great thanks to Squanto, the Wampanoag who befriended them and taught them how to grow the corn and fish and forage. What school child does not know the name of Squanto and his role in aiding the inherently superior European settlers to overcome initial hardships and adversity? Racism needs to be carefully taught and this cameo appearance by Squanto has been a prime lesson in that curriculum.

How many school children know the reason Squanto knew English? I certainly never knew that in 1615 he and 26 other Pawtuxet (the Wampanoag name for Plymouth) and Nauset Indians were taken by the English Captain Thomas Hunt and sold into slavery in Malaga, Spain. Squanto subsequently escaped to England and made his way back to Pawtuxet six months before the Pilgrims arrived only to find his people wiped out by the smallpox which Captain Hunt's vessel had also brought. Slavery, of course, was something that I was brought up to believe was the problem of the South and was what gave the North its great moral advantage in the Civil War. It is part of the Untold Story.

It is also part of the Untold Story that Plymouth is where the head of Massasoit's son, Metacom, called by the English "King Philip," was brought and placed on a stake for public display following the 1675 conflict known by the victors as King Philip's War. Jill Lepore's 1998 book, *The Name of War*, explores the meaning of the conflict itself, the identity issues at stake on both sides and the ways in which the memory of the struggle was used even in the 19th

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century to justify continued fear of native people and their continuing internment and removal.

I grew up within five miles of the site of the killing of 700 Pequot men, women and children by colonial troops in 1637. The occasion was the Green Corn Ceremony thanksgiving festival — Schemitzun — now a public annual festival under the sponsorship of the Mashantucket Pequots. To commemorate this “victory over the enemy” in 1637, the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony proclaimed the first official “Thanksgiving Day” which was then celebrated by New England colonists for the next hundred years.

The current fourth-Thursday-in-November model of an urbanized and consumer-oriented national holiday has lost both its harvest festival core and its religious import, except for the sparsely attended local ecumenical services which still seem mandatory. It is still a day for feasting, although as fewer and fewer people know how to cook for four, let alone for 40, it is not the family gathering it was. But it is the busiest airport day of the year and I suspect that has to do with the memory of “home” as being central to economic as well as emotional life. The homes the English colonists established were farms and therefore centers of local economic life. The New England landscape that is so central to my sense of beauty and identity — the stone walls and meadows which destroyed the native people’s way of life, introducing ideas of bounded ownership and domesticated herds of animals — is now threatened by new economic forces of urban sprawl and housing developments.

Stereotypes are debilitating to both sides. But as one of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum’s resource papers points out, it scarcely does any good to have the stereotypes of ignorant, naked savages replaced by ones of brutal, greedy whites. Our children need better options from us than that. But it is hard. As Elizabeth Theobald pointed out to me, the concept of grace and the tradition of giving thanks in both native and Christian traditions should be a point of possible mutual understanding and companionship.

One of the pieces in *Thanksgiving: A*

Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636 and settled in the area which he named Providence, Rhode Island. I remember Roger Williams as being persecuted for his religion and as a representative of the struggle for religious freedom. What I didn’t know was that when Williams arrived in the Bay area, he preached on two major themes: the separation of church and state and the invalidity of the king’s patent to seize land. Both Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay rejected his insistence that just title could be had only by buying the land directly from the Indians. Awiakta sees Roger Wil-

liams as a companion and peacemaker in those difficult days and someone who earned the trust of the Narragansett from whom the Rhode Island colony purchased land. The fact that he was doing this at the time of the Pequot War indicates the deeper tragedy that Europeans could have been companions on life’s journey rather than conquerors and establishers of a new economic and social order.

The hope, vision and commitment to work toward relationships based on just stewardship of the land as our common responsi-

bility to God and our mutual care for the local community is something for which I can be most thankful, although I have come to realize how resistant I am even to naming the history which so complicates the mythic and racist views of my own identity with which I grew up. Beginning to learn and talk about the Untold Story and the traditional native worldview, with which I find much to identify, has been difficult but necessary for me as someone who wants to be part of rebuilding a sustainable economy and community in the place which I, too, call home. **TW**



The Guardians by Mary Beckman

Native Perspective (Oyate, Berkeley, 1995, 1998) which Theobald’s staff gave me to help make up for my enormous cultural deprivation and lack of knowledge includes an excerpt from Marilou Awiakta’s book *Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother’s Wisdom*. Awiakta (Cherokee) describes two attitudes toward Native people that were evident during colonial times. One was that of companion, “a desire to coexist peacefully, as beans and squash do with corn. The other was the attitude of use and consume, as lethal to the concept of democracy as the corn borer is to the grain.”

Roger Williams was banished from the

Report from Iraq

by David Smith-Ferri

On July 18, 1999, with the summer sun high and hot overhead, Zaineب and her husband, Jamal, left their seven daughters in the care of a neighbor, climbed into their cranky pickup truck, and clattered 40 kilometers through the Iraqi desert to Najaf, a town 125 miles south of Baghdad in the so-called “southern no-fly zone.” At the hospital there, a sonogram showed Zaineب was pregnant with a boy. A boy! Overjoyed, the couple chose to visit a relative before returning home. But a half hour later, on a remote stretch of road, a bomb from a U.S. fighter plane landed near their truck, instantly killing Zaineب, Jamal, and their unborn child, and ending their dream.

Four days afterward, as part of a Voices in the Wilderness delegation, I visited Najaf, stopping first at the hospital to speak with survivors. Among the wounded was a young man to be married the following week, now paralyzed and unable to speak because of shrapnel in his brain. Across the room lay a 7-year-old boy whose right arm was severed by the explosion.

What do you say to a child who has just had his arm amputated, consequence of a

missile strike? How does a child make sense of sudden, random violence and its effects, of a foreign menace unleashing hatred from the sky? The personal meanings of some experiences, like slumbering beasts, lie in wait. As Christians, however, standing in the hospital among the wounded, the meanings for us were clear enough: In the very desert where Isaiah preached nonviolence, where Christ healed the lame and bid people of all ages be like children, U.S. bombs are crippling people and destroying childhood.

*A religious leader told us
that youth in his community
want to leave the country.*

*He has always implored them
to stay, “but it is getting
harder to preach hope.”*

After visiting the hospital, we drove to the bomb site. A crowd of roughly 150 people, a turbulent sea of faces and gesturing arms, shortly surrounded us. In chaotic fashion, people pointed out bloodstains on the road, took off their shirts or rolled their pant legs to show us bandaged wounds, brought us over 30 separate bomb parts, and repeatedly tried to direct us to houses in the community where other injured people lay recovering. Eventually, the sea parted, and a spokesperson emerged to address us. He asked the same question we had heard expressed, angrily or wearily, at every bedside in the hospital: “Why is your government doing this to us? Why are

they killing innocent people?”

Before I travelled to Iraq, I spoke with friends who were concerned for my safety. “Life is cheap there,” some of them said. But never once while in Iraq did I feel physically threatened. Iraqis at every level of society treated us with kindness and grace. “Hospitality,” a businessman told me, “is in our bones.” But standing in the hot sun in Najaf, with a mounting pile of bomb parts nearby and surrounded by evidence of a recent missile strike, I did indeed feel expendable, a small creature breathing in the shadow of a monster.

U.S. and British war planes, without U.N. authorization and in blatant violation of international treaties, “patrol” the airspace over roughly two-thirds of Iraq daily. During the first seven months of 1999, there were more than 115 missile strikes, over 40 percent of which resulted in civilian casualties, an assault on the people of Iraq which only rarely flares in the American consciousness. Part of what goes unmentioned in U.S. media reports is the terror these bombings engender. Every day, we were told, residents of Najaf hear U.S. warplanes fly overhead; because there is no pattern to the bombings, they never know if or when bombs will fall, and they are essentially powerless, with no influence over either their government or U.S. policies and actions.

When considering the effects of bombings on people in Iraq, it is critical to remember that they fall on a society which has been subject for over nine years to the most comprehensive embargo in history, an embargo which ensures that people are out of work, malnourished, drinking disease-laden water, and unable to obtain necessary medications. A doctor in Najaf, recognizing our interest in the bombings, cautioned us: “Let’s be clear. The bombings are very dramatic, but it’s the sanctions that are killing us.”

Though poorly publicized, the scale of the ongoing humanitarian tragedy in Iraq

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— thousands of young children and old people dying every month, over a million severely malnourished children — has been well-documented from the earliest days of the embargo. It is staggering to see infants and young children dying slowly of curable diseases, slipping like water or sand through their parents' fingers. At each bed in the pediatrics ward of a hospital in Basra, we sked the doctor for a prognosis, and at every bed he said, "This child will die ... that child will die." Finally, he turned to us sadly, "Look, they're all going to die. They're all going to die."

What is perhaps less well-documented, however, is the hopelessness which has begun to creep like a red tide, poisoning Iraqi society. This is particularly acute among young people, for whom the future offers no horizon toward which to journey, no star to guide or challenge. We met young adults — trained as engineers, architects, teachers — working as hotel receptionists, selling cigarettes or kerosene on the street, driving taxis. Hans von Sponeck, head of the U.N. Oil for Food program, commented on this: "A whole generation of young people — tomorrow's leaders — cannot apply their training. This is what we are doing with sanctions, and I cannot accept this ethically." He went on to say that "no one wishes to defend the Iraqi regime, but these young people are innocent of what has happened here."

A religious leader told us that youth in his community want to leave the country. He has always implored them to stay, "but it is getting harder to preach hope."

Parents feel this pain and powerlessness as deeply. Toma, a 35-year-old

Kurdish resident of Baghdad, gently exhorted me to speak to Americans about the hardships in his country. "It is not for me," he explained. "I have lived my life. It is for my children." Sattar, the kind and competent Iraqi man who served as our driver, chose not to enter the hospitals we visited: "In our country, the faces of dying children follow us wherever we



Ali Fadil, a 7-year-old Iraqi boy who lost his arm in a U.S./U.K. missile attack in the southern "no-fly zone."

go," he said. "I have two children. I worry every day about their future." At our parting, a businessman with whom I had shared dinner held my hand and implored passionately: "Please tell the American people we are not their enemies. Tell the American people we love them, but we must have our lives back."

For me, the impulse to travel to Iraq arose because I was finding it difficult to sleep at night pondering reports coming out of Iraq, and because of evidence of a direct link between suffering in Iraq and U.S. policies and actions. Many of us are deeply disturbed by the effects on Iraq of U.S./U.N. policies. For those of us who

feel called to go to Iraq, it remains possible: Voices in the Wilderness continues to take delegations of Americans regularly. But whether or not we actually travel to Iraq, the bulk of the work of solidarity happens here in the U.S.

My trip made it absolutely clear to me that there are people in Iraq whose very lives depend on our solidarity. Repeatedly, Iraqi people asked us to tell their stories, to be a voice for them here in America, where their voice is not heard. In trying to honor this request, there are four simple things we can do. First, we can learn about and enter imaginatively into present-day Iraq, by reading about it, watching videos, listening to speakers and praying. This places us alongside the people, where solidarity begins. Voices in the Wilderness has information about books, videos and speakers, and many reports about life today in Iraq.

Second, we can share our thoughts, feelings and questions with people around us, perhaps stimulating their interest. Third, we can contact our congressmembers by phone, letter or e-mail. This is crucial.

Let us educate our congressmembers and implore them to support Congressional hearings and formal investigations into the effects of U.S. policies in Iraq, policies which cost taxpayers upwards of \$2 billion annually.

Fourth, in all of this, we can align ourselves with other people in our communities who are working for peace and justice, so that we have support and so that our voices speak together, powerfully. U.S. foreign policy is a hand at the throat of ordinary Iraqi people. I believe it is ordinary American people who will demand that it release the pressure and let go. **TW**

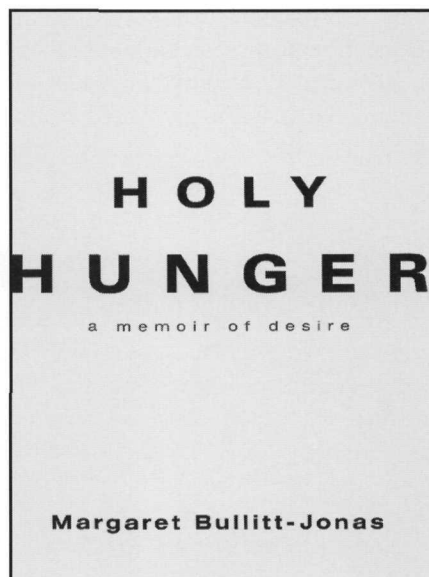
Food as the focus of desire

by Judith P. Carpenter

Holy Hunger: A Memoir of Desire by Margaret Bullitt-Jonas (N.Y.: Knopf, 1999).

Holy Hunger is a difficult book to write about; the subject is difficult and therefore so is the reading. It is the excruciatingly honest story of the author's secret addiction to binge eating and her eventual journey into recovery through the 12-step program—all set in the context of her painful family story. I grappled with this book, as I have grappled with my own history of food addiction and recovery. I find that I have profound respect for Bullitt-Jonas' courageous effort—and ambivalence about the result.

I believe, though, that this could be a life-saving book for someone still lost in food addiction, and Bullitt-Jonas claims this is her primary purpose in writing. She describes poignant vignettes from her childhood through early adulthood. We come to know about not only countless intimate details of her increasingly desperate and shame-filled binges, but also her emotionally inaccessible and depressed mother and her overbearingly exacting and alcoholic father. Bullitt-Jonas grew up in the context of great economic and educational privilege. Her mother came from wealth. Her father was a professor of 18th-century lit-



Although Bullitt-Jonas notes that abstinence is an act of resistance to the status quo, there is virtually no analysis of the systemic power dynamics involved.

erature at Harvard and Master of Quincy House there. The family presented a highly successful public face, which shattered when her father was asked to take a leave because of his problem with alcohol and her mother left him. The family's private face remained, however, one of denial, disconnection and demands for perfection.

Bullitt-Jonas began eating early on for solace and escape. As she grew, so did her compulsion. Although she and her siblings each pursued different paths to outward success, she followed most closely in her father's footsteps, ever seeking his elusive

love and approval by excelling in academia and entering a Ph.D. program in comparative literature at Harvard. However, the feelings which were disallowed expression in her family and which, despite years of therapy, were continually buried under food, almost killed her.

The turning point—for which the reader feels as eager as the writer—comes in the aftermath of a family intervention with her father regarding his drinking. In desperation Bullitt-Jonas sought help on her own behalf from the alcohol counselor who had helped with her father. She began to discern the spiritual roots of her problem. In Holy Week, 1982, at age 30, Bullitt-Jonas returned to church after years of absence, committed herself to a therapy group for adult children of alcoholics and prepared to enter Overeaters Anonymous (OA). She learned that emotional and spiritual recovery begins with physical recovery—with ceasing to eat anything other than the food on one's daily food plan no matter what!

As with every recovering addict in a 12-step program, Bullitt-Jonas gradually discovered the freedom and joy that comes from being part of a truth-telling community and from abstinence. She also discovered that changing the habitual responses of a lifetime, learning to stay with restlessness and emptiness, and dealing with feelings of anger, shame and loss are incredibly difficult tasks. For Bullitt-Jonas, communicating with her mother was crucial to recovery. She needed to know her mother's inner story in order to know herself. She had to deal with her father's continued drinking and his death in 1985. It took years of inner work before she could write this true and loving story—the only kind of story, she says, that can bring healing to others.

Holy Hunger is indeed “a memoir of desire”—surface desires, desire gone awry, and the underlying desire for fullness of life, for God. Bullitt-Jonas offers many clues to the daily nature of the spiritual

review


Judith Carpenter lives in Tenants Harbor, Me., and is part of the Greenfire Retreat House staff and community.

journey, but personally I wanted more than I found. I wanted her fuller story, not just the food and family-of-origin story. I wanted to meet the maturing woman who became a priest, wife, mother, spiritual director, retreat leader, lecturer on spirituality at the Episcopal Divinity School and, most recently, the first woman to be appointed chaplain to the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops. I wanted more of her wisdom than was shared. Perhaps that will come in another book. Perhaps this painfully confessional account had to be written first as part of her own redemptive process.

This is an important book. It reveals the underside of a very secretive subject and thus might be of great help to active food addicts or to those who know one. But this is a far-from-perfect book on the subject. Although Bullitt-Jonas notes that abstinence is an act of resistance and challenge to the status quo, there is virtually no analysis of the systemic power dynamics involved. She does not deal with such questions as, What is going on with the food industry that makes our global eating patterns so unhealthy? Why are young girls and women so vulnerable to eating disorders? How much is the mega diet industry fueling preoccupation with weight and the resulting diet/binge addictive cycle?

There is also no analysis of the dynamics of class, race or educational privilege — no acknowledgment of how this privilege has protected as well as wounded Bullitt-Jonas. OA may be relatively accessible, depending on where one lives, but Bullitt-Jonas seems to have both the time and the money to take advantage of many other resources and opportunities. There may not be a valid hierarchy of pain and suffering in the human experience, but there are systemic hierarchies of oppression which can significantly affect people's access to life-fulfilling possibilities. As a result, I sadly suspect there may be many food addicts who will have trouble finding themselves in *Holy Hunger*. **TW**

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Baldemar Velásquez's decision to organize farmworkers in midwestern fruit and vegetable fields was propelled by one simple ingredient: anger. What has kept him in the struggle is another ingredient he has heartily cultivated in recent years: his Christian faith.

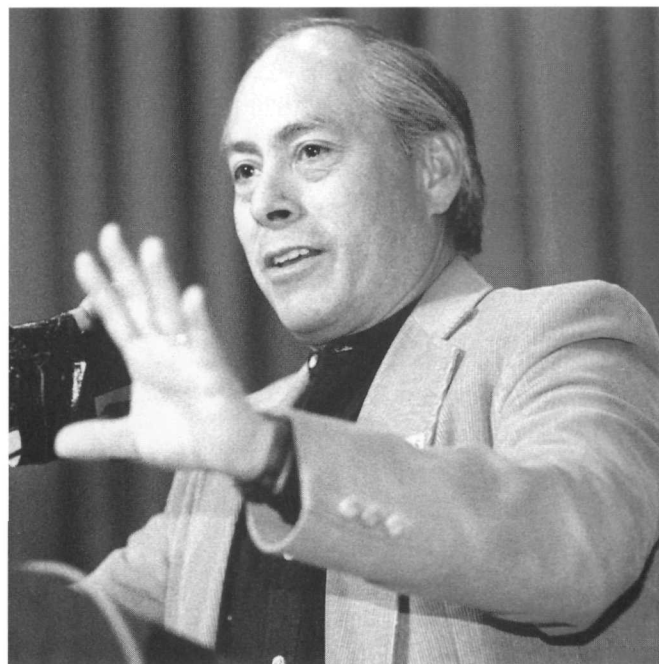
Velásquez, who lives in Toledo, Ohio, is a 52-year-old father of four and the founder of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). The union has 7,000 mostly Spanish-speaking farmworkers picking tomatoes, cherries and peaches in places like Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. For Velásquez, as for the late Cesar Chavez who organized farmworkers in the western U.S., spiritual matters underpin the struggle made on behalf of others.

"I get my foundation from reflecting on what is written in the scriptures," said Velásquez, who was raised Roman Catholic but in recent years has attended evangelical Christian churches.

"I believe that our battles in this world, as noted in Ephesians 6:12, are not against flesh and blood but powers and principalities. You see these horror movies where people are possessed. Well, people are possessed with good things or bad things in their hearts. We're engaged in an ideological struggle to make people live up to the lofty philosophies they profess to believe in."

One person Velásquez would like to see living up to professed ideals is Bill Bryan, a man described as a devout Methodist who also happens to be the CEO of

"We're engaged in an ideological struggle to make people live up to the lofty philosophies they profess to believe in."



Baldemar Velásquez

Jim West

Ordained to organize

by Kate DeSmet

Mt. Olive Pickle Company in North Carolina. Mt. Olive, the country's second largest pickle company, is FLOC's latest boycott target. The union wants to organize the 5,000 workers who work in difficult and, in some cases, life-threatening circumstances picking cucumbers purchased by Mt. Olive.

The boycott is supported by more than 100 religious denominations and labor groups, including the AFL-CIO. FLOC is also mobilizing activists in cities where Mt. Olive pickles are sold and targeting Mt. Olive's financial structure for "soft spots," as Velásquez puts it.

In many ways this is a classic labor struggle: a wealthy corporation versus struggling workers and union leaders. Bryan says he won't negotiate and calls

the FLOC boycott "blackmail." Yet when Velásquez answers back, his tone is hardly classic for such labor battles. Instead, the union leader's response is decidedly evangelical — with an adversarial bite.

"Bill Bryan professes to believe Christian ideas. He also has a vested interest in the seeding, planting and selling of pickles. Many thousands of undocumented Mexicans are working to make that possible. The scriptures, particularly in Leviticus and Numbers, are clear: God watches jealously over the widow, orphans and aliens. God says we are not to exploit, take advantage of, or abuse any of these or we'll answer to him. For the sake of his soul, Bill Bryan has to be reconciled with the workers."

Along with religion, Velásquez learned

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Kate DeSmet is a locked-out *Detroit News* religion writer, <kdesmet@home.com>.

early about the power of his own anger. He was angry at how his parents, five brothers and three sisters were treated as farmworkers in the early years of his life. They'd migrated to the Midwest from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas in the late 1950s to pick sugar beets, apples, cherries and potatoes.

"We got stranded in Ohio because we didn't have enough money to go back home," Velásquez said. "We had to borrow money all winter just to eat and then, the next spring, we had to work for free to pay off our debts. We were indentured servants for seven to eight years just to get out of debt. By then I was in high school and I was just so angry about what I saw."

What he saw among fellow farmworkers were the devastating effects of "stoop labor": a mortality rate of 47 years; a high infant mortality rate; below-poverty wages; child labor; and rodent-infested housing.

In the mid-1960s, as a college student, he came in contact with civil rights and anti-war activists. One summer he volunteered with C.O.R.E. (Congress of Racial Equality), living in a Cleveland tenement building with an African-American activist. One morning the activist asked Velásquez why the tenement's rats didn't bother him. Velásquez replied that "growing up as a farmworker you get used to such things. My brother and I had a game with the rats that used to crawl up the couch when we were trying to sleep. The rat would fall on our blanket and we'd suddenly flip the blanket and see how far the rat would fly."

The black activist looked at Velásquez and said, "Good Lord man, why aren't you doing something for your own people?" Velásquez said he went back to college with "that question and a dark cloud over my head."

The cloud lifted the next summer. He went cherry picking in northern Michigan, spending all his free time with the

question, "If I were going to organize me as a farmworker, what would I have to do to convince myself?" He scribbled his ideas down on notepaper at night, and set out to meet other organizers. In 1969, he traveled west and met Chavez of the United Farm Workers union for the first time. When asked his impression of Chavez, Velásquez replied: "I knew that was exactly what I wanted to do."

He went back home and concentrated

*Velásquez says he's
determined to convince
evangelical conservatives
to heed the Bible's call
for social justice.*

on the fertile fields of the Midwest. By 1979, FLOC was officially organized as a union. It was during that time Velásquez and fellow activists made headlines by taking on one of the country's largest corporations: Campbell Soup Co.

FLOC conducted an eight-year strike against Campbell's to unionize the thousands of farmworkers picking tomatoes for the soup giant. A national boycott and demonstrations led to historic agreements between Campbell's, the growers, and the farmworkers. Eventually FLOC won similar agreements with Heinz, Vlasic, Aunt Jane's and Green Bay.

It remains a different story in the south where FLOC is now focused. One study reports that farmworker conditions in North Carolina, where Mt. Olive Pickle Co. operates, are among the poorest and most oppressive in the nation. Most workers are putting in 10-hour days with few breaks, living in houses with no stoves or beds. One worker collapsed from heat stroke in a tomato field and lapsed into a coma from which he has not recovered. Another Mexican worker, Reymundo

Hernandez, disappeared and was later found dead.

"A worker found Hernandez' skull under a pecan tree," Velásquez said. "All that remained were his clothes and sandals. They took what was left to the coroner's office and his remains stayed there for several months. The company never even paid to have them shipped back to his widow. That didn't happen until we found out about it and took care of it." Hernandez had died from pesticide poisoning.

This man's tragic death deeply affected Velásquez. He retells the story to anyone he believes could be motivated to action — especially fellow evangelicals. Velásquez says he's determined to convince evangelical conservatives to heed the Bible's call for social justice.

One example: Two hundred conservative students from Toledo Christian High School, where two of Velásquez' children are students, attended a recent FLOC rally. The reason? Velásquez said it was because he "told the truth" during a school meeting about worker conditions. He spoke of Hernandez' death and asked students to pray and fast for Hernandez' widow. He even asked them to donate their lunch money to her. The students raised \$1,000. Velásquez went a step further: He arranged for a small delegation of students to personally deliver the money to Hernandez' widow, who lives in a small Mexican village. The group "was deeply affected by the poverty they saw," Velásquez said.

Velásquez said he feels "ordained" to organize the oppressed while reaching out in reconciliation to those who do the oppressing either through word, deed or inactivity.

"If we have a God who will release us from bondage we can walk like a winner and not a victim," Velásquez said. "And as a winner you can afford to be gracious." **TW**

Letters, continued from page 3

and observations that EDS made in granting her this honor.

I met Jeanie at the 1997 Finger Lakes Conference (Province II of the Episcopal Church) as she was the keynote speaker and participant. I was still recovering from some serious disability, discrimination and retaliation and sought solace and restoration in the conference. Her being the keynote speaker called me there. I encountered Jeanie's presence to me in this way that I shall treasure and never forget. Within the communities of baptized Christians, she is one of the few people that related to me as whole again. May you feel my full sense of presence to you. This comes with thanksgiving and blessings of Life.

**Catherine Edwards
Rochester, NY**

Wedgwood shooting

WHEN I TURNED ON THE TELEVISION and saw the words "Shooting in Fort Worth Church" spread across the screen I felt sick. It is a terrible thing to see any city suffer such an attack. But when it is one's own beloved city, the sense of dread and horror is overwhelming. Despite being in the third-fastest-growing county in Texas, Fort Worth still is a large city that feels like a small town. That means many people in Fort Worth will know someone who was at Wedgwood Baptist Church Wednesday

night, or they will know someone who knows someone who was at the church.

That was brought home to me after the shooting as I was waiting in line to donate blood at the Carter Blood Center in Fort Worth's medical district. Although it wasn't the Carter office closest to the church, I talked with people whose relatives or friends had been at the church or who had some tie to it. Among them were two Mexican-American construction workers who had worked on building projects at the church, an African-American "biker for Christ" who had a buddy who had a son at the youth rally Wednesday evening and three downtown businessmen who knew Wedgwood's pastor.

Also waiting were an African-American sales executive who had a customer who went to the church, a young Anglo mother whose baby sitter attended the church, an older Asian woman whose yard was mowed by a Baptist seminary student and an older Anglo gentleman who said his wife's best friend attended the church.

But what struck me even more about the folks waiting to donate blood was the fact that most of them had no personal connection to the church. This mannerly, motley crew was made up of people of many races, ages, occupations and faiths. They had only one thing in common: They all lived in Fort Worth, and they were stunned, outraged and saddened beyond belief that such a violent attack had happened in their town to people who, except for an accident of local geography, might have been their next-door neighbors. That fact

alone was more than enough to make them feel deeply connected to the victims and their families and to the stunned congregation of Wedgwood Baptist Church.

That was true even though many never even had been to the Wedgwood area of the city, much less to the church. Others, like me, knew the church only from driving by it. My daughter attended a grade school only blocks from the church. For years, we lived in a neighborhood just north of it. The church was part of our daily landscape, a reference point to use when giving people directions. But even that tenuous connection proved a powerful bond as I watched heartbreaking footage of injured and dying people, traumatized teens and terrified parents. Those are my neighbors, and what hurts them hurts me.

In the days to come, this shooting in a church in Fort Worth will become just one more item on the steadily growing list of such incidents. It will be trotted out as a "sidebar" story the next time some sick or frustrated man with a gun walks into a school, church or business in Somewhere, America, and begins shooting. But here in Fort Worth, it will remain the main story for a long time. For those people we saw on television Wednesday night aren't just interchangeable characters in a story called Violence in America. They are our neighbors, linked to us not only by a place on a map but by places in our hearts.

**Katie Sherrod
Fort Worth, TX**

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