

Thoughts on Food Security from Blue Heron Farm

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In her talk before the IFOAM Conference in Vancouver, BC last year, Anne addressed some concerns about local food security; excerpts follow.

One thing that is becoming very clear to me is the need to articulate a vision of community food security based on a local food supply. Getting young people to think about their food is as important now as it was to educate them about environmental stewardship 30 years ago when the first Earth Day was held in Washington DC.

For the past three decades we have seen a need to get young people engaged in understanding ecology. We needed to start with a new generation to teach them about the importance of protecting habitat and diversity as well as treating all peoples fairly and with respect. That work must now be broadened to include the goals of local food security for all peoples and must include the fair treatment of people and animals involved with the production of food. That this is already happening is evident at WTO, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund meetings around the globe which draw large protests wherever these meetings are held in free countries. People everywhere are frustrated with the concentration of economic wealth, people no longer trust corporate monopolies and recent events in the US with ENRON and WORLD-COM merely bring to light much of the corruption people long have suspected in the global concentration of wealth and power.

In my research, I have found a wellspring of new writings and efforts underway throughout the US to capture and challenge (confront) the damage being wrought upon our health, our communities and our farms as small farmers lose their place in the world economies controlled by global food corporations. Here is a small sampling of recent offerings:

- *Fatal Harvest*, the tragedy of Industrial Agriculture. Published with support by The Foundation for Deep Ecology, this book features a list of authors and activists (I should call them warriors for the work they do.. .)who lay out the problems and hopes for recreating a food system linked to community. Several authors help us understand the social and cultural costs associated with our lost connections to growing, preparing and sharing food in community with family and friends. The writers and visionaries who come together in this book challenge the corporate mentality of food on the fly with no connections to the earth and people from whence the food comes. They share with us new stories of communities and governments fostering discussions and programs designed to link urban residents with real farmers and in preparing healthy food that feeds our bodies and our spirits. They challenge us to think about ethical eating not just ethical growing practices. They challenge us to define a new vision of Community Food Security and an agrarian ethic that honors the source of food and the vitality contained in that food. And the writers challenge the organic food community to fight for fairness and integrity and integration of the original core values and not just standards that become codified to meet the needs of food processing corporations.

- Last spring The Evergreen State College in Washington hosted their second in a series of

conferences about food from Farm to Table, with the focus this year on starting their own program utilizing more local food in their campus menus and what it would take to purchase local products there at the college.

- In a recent issue of the monthly publication, "Growing For Market," the editor introduces two alternatives to organic certification: The Certified Naturally Grown started by a New York CSA farmer and the Wholesome Food Association based in Great Britain which though in their infancy sets the stage for small farmers attempting to regain control of claims of earth-friendly growing practices.
- Social Stewardship Standards for Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Agriculture. Written by Elizabeth Henderson, Michael Sligh, Richard Mandelbaum and Oscar Mendieta Chavez this document has received wide circulation in the organic and sustainable agriculture communities and attempts to lay out foundational principals for food justice and viable, thriving small farming through out the world. A primary hope is to inspire dialogue around issues of economic equity and justice for small farmers, farm workers and indigenous peoples with one goal being the inclusion of social justice issues by certification groups around the United States and elsewhere.
- Again, in a recent issue of Growing for Market, the editor shares her story about a summer day camp for teens called "Local Food to Local Kids". Thirty 12-14 year olds spend a week learning about nutrition and local food production. They visited local farms, watched the city's best chefs cook with locally grown food, and made their own feasts out of local ingredients. This was funded by a USDA SARE grant through Kansas State Extension as part of a broader Local Food to Local People Project. This sounds very exciting.
- The CFSC hosted a national conference in Seattle in early October entitled; From Farm to Cafeteria, to highlight efforts around the U.S. to link schools and farms. This will be followed by their annual conference with the theme "Eating Locally, Thinking Globally", which features the CFSC efforts to build a new generation of community food security leaders, and provides solid foundational organizing tools for communities engaged in local food projects.
- In our state, Washington Tilth Producers has been working with a coalition of other groups which together make up the Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network. We have made enormous gains in pushing for organic research land, a new small farm program, a new organic and sustainable agriculture curriculum at WSU, and funding for direct marketing assistance from the WSDA.

In his paper on The Real Costs of Globalization to Farmers, Consumers, and Our Food System, John Ikerd, an agriculture economist and rural sociologist from the University of Missouri, lays out clearly the problems created by an agriculture modeled on industrialism and controlled by global corporations I will leave you with a quote from this paper:

It would be easy to be skeptical about the possibility of local food systems—such systems currently make up such a small part of the huge global food system. Farmers and consumers may seem too few and too weak to confront the giant global food corporations. However, the trend toward a global food system, occurring over the past several decades, took place one farmer and one customer at a time. One-by-one, as farmers changed what they produced, and where they sold their products, and consumers changed what they ate, and where they bought their food, a food system that had been local became global. Again, one-by-one, we can and must make the changes needed to create a sustainable, local food system.

And as there is huge growth and interest in farmers markets and CSA's, more and more farmers including conventional farmers see this as their only way to survive. One well known conventional but progressive grower in my community recently said one of him could put 30 small growers out of business at one of the thriving Seattle farmer's markets. A well-liked farmer, he also said he has no interest in doing that but they are looking into selling direct to local markets and are trying to make inroads into supplying local schools and hospitals. We will continue to see many changes in the decade to come and organic as well as conventional growers should be working shoulder to shoulder to educate the consumer about the importance

of buying locally.

I think we will find that we will have much to gain by working with our conventional neighbors in the work of developing local markets. I think we will see that our own survival will be much more dependent on keeping healthy farming communities and teaching people to eat locally than supporting an organic standard that has basic food stuffs being shipped all over the world to fill packaging more cheaply.

Anne has long served alternative agriculture in the Northwest and around the world, a leader in the field. She has recently been recognized by WSU for the Pacific Northwest's Women's History Award for Leadership and Public Service and internationally has been invited to speak at a major conference in Rome! (Due to the current unrest the latter has been canceled.) Congratulations, Anne. We've honored you all along!