Helping Western Missouri Producers and Consumers Connect Through Food

December 1999

Food Circles Networking Project

Urban Market Helps Build Food Links
By Thomas Kerr

The Troost Community Market has finished its first season with exciting results. Crowds averaged near 400 people per week as word got out about this new market. Getting off to a late July 3rd start, seemed to have little effect on developing a regular clientele. Familiar faces appeared regularly on Saturday mornings, causing vendors to return week after week.

From a co-mingling of ideas, the Market has grown into a sustainable community event. Growers from as close as Jackson Street and as far off as Chillicothe, Marshall, and Clinton sold free-range pork, delicious okra, and other locally grown foods from under the awning of the old Firstone Building.

Begun out of neighborhood demand for a common meeting ground, and organized in part by the Kansas City FOCUS Project, the Troost Community Market serves social, economic and urban food access needs while allowing nearby residents to take active roles of leadership in its planning and management.

The Troost Community Market also provides venues for small business entreprenuers and local farmers to sell side by side, further emphasizing issues of local importance. Over twelve farmers sold their produce, some organic, some not, and one pork producer became a committed regular vendor.

A frequently heard comment by shoppers was how fresh their food was. One customer, a working mother of five children who bought four big bags of produce and meat each week, reported favorable results when she changed the diets of her family during the Market season.

While the mother wishes to remain anonymous, she said, on September 11th, the last consecutive Saturday market, a noticeable improvement in her children's behavior had taken place over the nine weeks of shopping at Troost. (See TCM on page 2)

Helping coordinate farmers’ markets, educate consumers about food issues, and facilitate direct marketing by growers to restaurants retailers, and eaters.

Battle in Seattle: A Food Circles Perspective
By Mary Hendrickson and William Heffernan

Tens of thousands of people gathered in Seattle last week to protest the World Trade Organization. The protests in Seattle are likely to be a first wave of international reaction to globalization. After coverage of violence, labor and environment received many of the media’s soundbites, but one of the key areas of debate in the WTO focuses on our food system. Issues of contention are those of subsidies for small-scale agriculture in the industrialized North, genetically modified food, and the use of hormones in livestock. However, what’s really at stake is the question – what kind of food system do we want? (See WTO on page 2)

Consumers Concerned About Food System

It’s official! American consumers are concerned about who produces their food and how! A poll conducted by the non-profit Communicating for Agriculture found, in early August, that 59% of consumers believe family farmers are more likely to keep food costs down than are national or multi-national corporations.

Of the randomly selected respondents, 83% say that family farmers would do a better job of protecting the land and environment, and 78% believe that family farmers are more likely to be concerned about food safety compared with large agribusinesses.

Furthermore, Americans want to help out family farmers. If they were a sitting member of Congress, 84% would provide a $6 billion farm relief package.

This is similar to findings reported in the Ecologist which reported a Novartis survey found most Americans to prefer organic agriculture as the dominant system of food production, and over 90% supported labeling of genetically engineered food products.
She attributed this to the fresh produce she was able to prepare for her children's meals, and indicated that prior to shopping at the Troost Community Market she had been feeding her children canned foods and less of a regular diet comprised of fresh produce and home-cooked meals.

According to the 1990 census, within a mile radius of Troost Ave. and Linwood Blvd., 15,000 people reside, but nowhere can families buy fresh produce except Saturdays at the Troost Market. In part, due to a 30 percent rate of poverty within the area, TCM was a redemption site for WIC Farmers Market Vouchers. Six farmers selling at Troost were certified to accept the vouchers, and they helped tally an over 40 percent redemption rate among Kansas City's participating markets.

Next year, the Troost Community Market will begin on May 1st and operate each Saturday, between 7 a.m. and 1 p.m., through September. For more information call the Troost Community Market hotline at (816) 931-8805.

By making sustainable connections between growers and "eaters" of food, we acknowledge the many ways of thinking about agriculture. However, thinking about changing our food system is not enough, as many rural growers around Columbia have expressed. "While the concept sounds simple, it means that we must change the way we participate in the act of growing and consuming food." (Columbia Area Food Circle Directory, 1998)

The food and agriculture system was the last major sector to industrialize and globalize, and it is changing just when serious questions are being raised about the treatment of our environment and people in an globalized world. Food takes center stage because it is different from all other products in that it is a necessity needed on a regular basis. With these issues of power, food moves very quickly into the political arena! But even more than that, food is a extremely personal issue, rooted in the very social and cultural fabric of our lives.

How does such a personal and political issue get played out in WTO economics? Simple, the WTO is deciding the rules about food – how it will be produced and traded between countries. For example, in the 1970's environmentalists were successful in seeing passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, requiring new fishing techniques to spare dolphins being caught with tuna. However, due to litigation, implementation didn’t happen until the 1990’s, when, citing economic damage from lost sales to their own fishing industries, Mexico and Venezuela sued the U.S. and won under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the precursor to the WTO). Basically, it is illegal under world trade rules to require that tuna sold in the US be caught with "Dolphin Safe" techniques.

But how does that affect us as consumers? We can still buy voluntarily labeled "Dolphin Safe" tuna. But who will decide about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food? Or bovine growth hormone in milk? So far in the US it has been impossible to label these products for fear of implying that one product is better than another. Europeans, however, want their food labeled; they also don't want to buy meat with hormones in it, but the US argues that is an unfair barrier to trade. How soon will we get caught in the same net – as we did with the tuna case?

Free trade? Fair trade? One of the best ways to deal with this on a household level is to buy food from a farmer whose face you can see and whose farm you can visit. What better way to find this kind of personalized food than through the FCNP, or local Food Circles? Then you can determine what's in your food – and if the environment, animals and people involved have been treated justly. However, we do fall under WTO rules whenever we import food from another country -- and currently we are importing one-third of the fruits and vegetables we eat in the US, along with beef and other products. That's why the WTO becomes important to all of us as consumers.

The Food Circles Networking Project Newsletter is available on-line at: www.foodcircles.missouri.edu

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Celebration for Gardeners
By Ruth Anne Parrott
The past growing season was a real learning experience for the families of the Warrensburg Community Garden. On October 30 the families got back together to clean garden plots and spread loads of manure that were donated and hauled in by a local sell barn. This was good exercise as we dug those shovels in and moved the manure. When complaints were made about being tired of the shoveling, the comment was repeated at how good those tomatoes would be next year. A tool shed, built by the members of the Church of the Nazarene where the garden is located, was delivered later in the day.

After the work was done, gardeners celebrated with a dinner of hot dogs and desserts to make up for the calories lost during the shoveling. Certificates of appreciation and recognition were presented to the supporters and gardeners. Each gardener then shared stories from their experience. One gardener made relishes from her cucumbers and placed at the Missouri State Fair. Next year watch out for more of the gardeners to enter produce at the State Fair. Even though the summer of 1999 was not the most productive growing season, the Warrensburg Community Garden grew very important crop-friendships.

Perenniating Wisdom
By Thomas Kerr
Some call it self-reliance. Others common sense. Yet for most gardeners, growing food is a perennating part of our lives, a green thumb extending from our life hand, with the need to plant and watch things grow renewed with each spring's return.

We at the Food Circles Networking Project advocate gardens as places where people work own food, process learn ecology and return for dents, we say, rural farmers residents on ground, to ences and help ization of our

"A kiss of the sun for pardon,
A song of the birds for mirth
One is nearer god's heart in a
garden,
Than anyplace else on earth."
- Dorothy Frances Gurney

Let's try for a garden in every neighborhood, and a neighborhood in every garden.
Put On Your Walking Shoes
For Grassland Preservation
By Ruth Anne Parrott

The Lek Trek is a 565 mile walk across
Missouri, planned for July 21 to October
14, 2000. Sponsored by the Missouri
Prairie Foundation to raise public
awareness of the importance of
grasslands, the Lek Trek route will zigzag
through western counties, connecting
with 16 special events featuring local
food, history, and information. The Food
Circle Networking Project has is working
with the organizers of the walk to
heighten the public's attention of our local
food system.

Native grasslands present important
aspects to our rural communities, such
as animal habitat, sources of biodiversity,
and agricultural economic benefits. Lek
Trek is encouraging farmers and eaters
to walk together across the state. This
would give consumers the chance to meet
and develop personal relationships with
farmers who grow food in their area.

Farms are also being sought to host
walkers on the route meandering
between Harrison and Henry Counties.
For more information or to receive the
Lek Trek Newsletter, contact Sharron
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Springs, MO  64744 /417-876-5226 /
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This Project funded by Missouri Department of Agriculture
through a grant to:

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