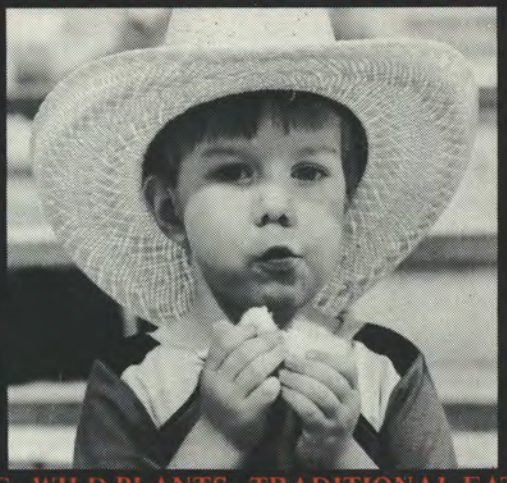
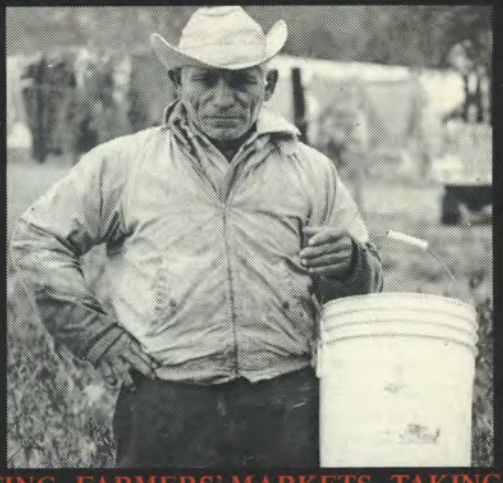
Southern Exposure

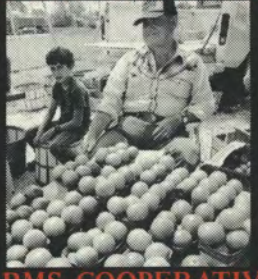
# OUR FOOD

SELF-RELIANCE GOOD EATING FAMILY FARMS COOPERATIVES NUTRITION ORGANIC FARMING GOOD

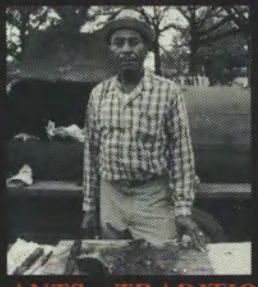
HEALTH FARM LABOR ORGANIZING WILD PLANTS TRADITIONAL EATING FARMERS' MARKETS TAKING



CONTROL SELF-RELIANCE GOOD EATING FAMILY FARMS COOPERATIVES NUTRITION ORGANIC FARMING



GOOD HEALTH FARM LABOR ORGANIZING WILD PLANTS TRADITIONAL EATING FARMERS' MARKETS

# OUR COMMON GROUND

$4.00

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The Good Life on a 25-Acre Farm

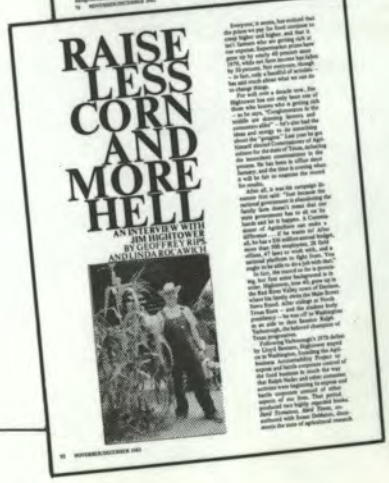



Gather Ye Wild Things




BILLIONS OF CHICKENS
THE BUSINESS OF THE SOUTH
BY HOPE SHAND




RAISE LESS CORN AND MORE HELL
AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM HIGHTOWER
BY GEOFFREY RIPS AND LINDA ROCAWICH

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## RESOURCES



## DEPARTMENTS

# SOUTHERN NEWS ROUNDUP

## Drought aid proves too slow for farmers

Farmers in the South, already squeezed between high debt payments and low market prices, have just experienced the worst drought in 50 years. Total harvest yields are not compiled, but the number of counties applying for federal disaster relief is growing to staggering proportions. In Georgia, 155 of the 159 counties have filed; in South Carolina, 43 of 46; in Louisiana, 33 of 64; in Mississippi, 51 of 82; and in North Carolina, 55 of 100.

To qualify for relief loans, 30 percent of a county's farmers must lose more than 30 percent of their crops. But loans are only part of a possible federal response, and politics as much as math will likely determine how much help farmers get from Washington.

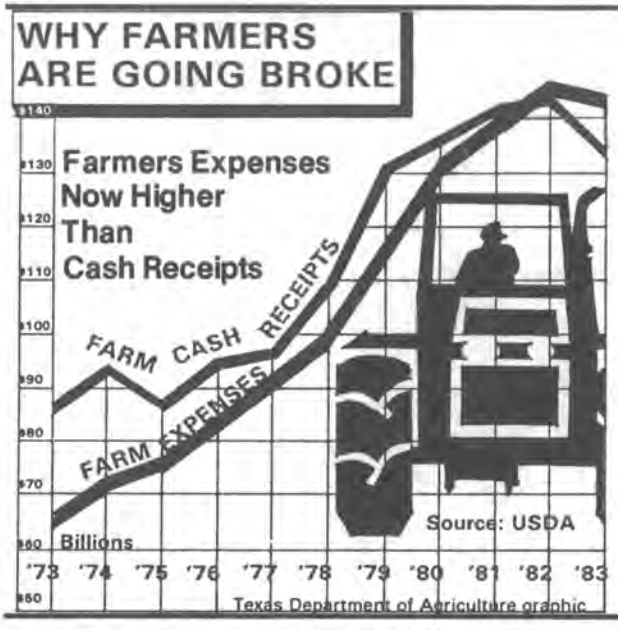
At their annual meeting this fall, Southern governors unanimously called on President Reagan to declare a national emergency and appoint a coordinator inside the White House to cut through the red tape of relief programs. The governors – nearly all Democrats – also called for the release of government-owned feed grains to livestock producers and for direct cash payments to farmers in addition to emergency loans.

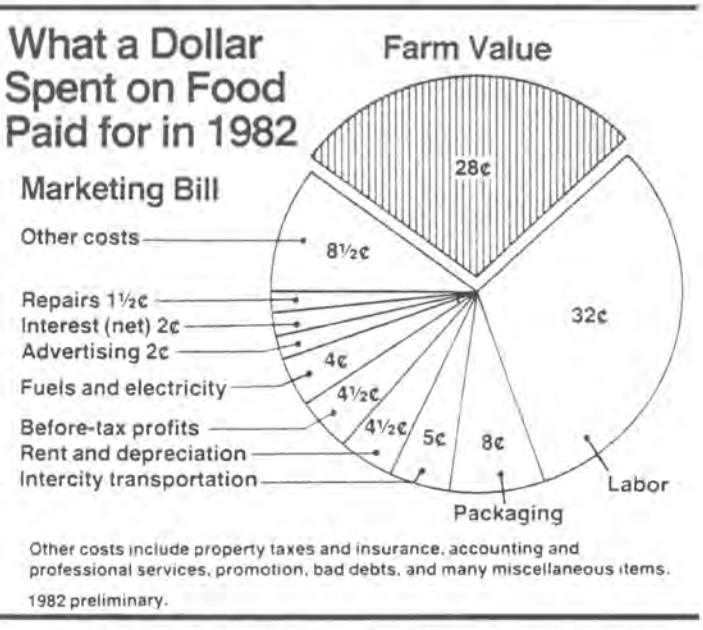
Although pressure is building from the Midwest farm belt and other regions, the Reagan administration has only reluctantly agreed to lower interest rates on Farmers Home Administration disaster loans from eight to five percent and to sell federal grain to drought-stricken ranchers and farmers. The centerpiece of Reagan's agricultural policy, the Payment-In-Kind (PIK) program is already providing $12 billion worth of commodities to farmers, the biggest pay-out in the nation's history. That still may not be enough for the nation's growers, who have suffered three straight years of expenses outpacing income.

In exchange for leaving acres idle, the PIK program gives farmers equivalent amounts of soybeans, cotton, rice, and grains they can sell on the open market or use for their livestock. The theory behind PIK said prices – and farm income – would increase if the federal surplus decreased. But when farmers rushed to enroll in the program and then idled their worst land while continuing to plant sizable acreage, it looked like a flood of commodities on the fall market would again depress prices. Fortunately for Reagan, the drought changed all that; prices are definitely going up.

For farmers in the PIK program, particularly the larger Midwestern ones, the commodities they receive should generally offset the effects of the drought. But for many smaller farmers, especially those in the South, and others growing crops not covered by PIK, the low yields from the drought means they can't take advantage of the steeper prices. Grain consumers – specifically poultry, pork, and beef producers – are also being hurt because they can't afford to buy the quantities of feed they need to keep up their animal stocks. As a consequence, livestock farmers in the South, where the drought was the worst, are leading the campaign to get government-owned grain released under the disaster aid programs.

The final toll of the drought is not yet known, but experts predict more family farmers will go bankrupt or miss their loan payments. In the region covering Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas, foreclosures by the Federal Land Bank, which handles half the real estate loans to farmers, have jumped 95 percent over last year. This increase, largely



coming from 1982 cases carried over to 1983, is expected to shoot up again around the time consumers feel the bite of higher food prices at the corner store.

For Ronald Reagan, the mismanagement of drought relief, higher food prices for consumers, and an exorbitant yet ineffective mishmash of farm support programs could add up to a sizable block of hostile voters by 1984.

## Atlanta cashes in on international trade

Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young promised voters in 1981 he would turn his experience as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations into cash for the city. True to his word, Young is using his trans-Atlantic contacts to benefit Atlanta as well as set an example for how other mayors can recruit international business.

A telling example of Young's appeal came last summer when his friend Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, chose to address a gathering of Atlanta business executives *before* traveling to Washington to meet with high-level U.S. officials.

The Mayor's successes also include: the supply of high-tech communications equipment from an Atlanta firm to a Nigerian news agency; a week-long trade mission to Jamaica and Trinidad which brought $150 million in trade agreements to local businesses; sponsorship of a conference with Saudi Arabian business leaders which netted $100 million in U.S. contracts; and the organization of an up-coming conference to be held in Tunisia for U.S. corporations and development and planning officials from Third World nations.

Business leaders originally skeptical of Young's campaign promise now applaud his moves. But some Atlantans say Young's travels are too closely tied with his international consultant firm, Young Ideas, and that his trips take him away from pressing duties, as when he missed a key city council vote on raising taxes because he was attending the inauguration of the Nigerian president.

Young insists that promoting international trade is not just good business; it also fulfills a social and political responsibility the U.S. has largely ignored toward trading with former European colonies whose leaders want to establish their independence.

With global politics increasingly dominant in our lives and with the U.S. trade deficit at a record $70 billion, Young argues responsive political leaders must get involved personally in the international community. In September, he carried his message to the National League of Cities' first International Trade Development Conference, which was organized by an NLC taskforce he co-chairs.

"Miami Mayor Maurice Ferre has saved his city by hunting international business," Young said. "The future of San Antonio depends on the bridges Mayor Henry Cisneros builds to Mexico. The federal government has failed us, so mayors have to deal with corporations and foreign countries to establish new models for trade and development to keep their cities alive."

## Local union members join forces in Meridian

Workers on strike against Hardin's Bakery since July have spurred an alliance among union members in Meridian, Mississippi. A pro-labor march and fundraising drive in support of the Bakery, Confectionary & Tobacco Workers Union brought together unions representing automobile workers, machinists, stage employees, electrical, communications, and furniture workers.

The alliance of unions also backed the United Furniture Workers organizing drive at the Pilliod furniture plant, which moved to this "right-to-work" state from Ohio earlier this year. The UFWA lost the representation election on November 4 by a vote of 180 to 147, but it has vowed to keep fighting for a union. It filed 19 separate unfair labor practice charges against Pilliod with the National Labor Relations Board (which now has a backlog of 1,336 cases). Following an increasingly popular practice, the company has slapped the union staff with a $1.75 million suit for allegedly slandering Pilliod's attorney, W. Kerby Bowling. In 1980, Bowling represented another company during a strike which the Furniture Workers won in Memphis.

In a meeting following the Pilliod election, workers were cheered by members of Meridian unions, who told stories about how they too had lost their first bid for union representation. "Your cooperation with us has given true meaning to the word 'solidarity,'" responded UFWA representative Henry Key. "With this type of continuing effort, organizing in the South can only gain momentum."

## Carthan finally freed, seeks full exoneration

Supporters of Eddie Carthan and the Tchula 7 took to the streets in Holmes County, Mississippi, again on November 5. But this time they were celebrating Carthan's release from federal prison and the end of three years of incessant harassment by local, state, and U.S. prosecutors.

The string of criminal charges against Carthan – and the grassroots movement to defend him – began in 1980 when his policies as the first black mayor of Tchula enraged the local white planters and power structure. Last October, he was acquitted of a murder charge, and in June of this year, the state finally suspended his sentence for an assault conviction stemming from an incident between his six deputized policemen and a white appointee of his opponents on the Tchula city council (see *SE*, Jan./Feb., 1983). Carthan was the last of the Tchula 7 to be freed.

Arnett Lewis, director of the United League of Holmes County, which led the international defense movement, said, "A year ago, Mississippi officials were not just trying to put Eddie in prison forever. They intended to send him to the gas chamber. We turned that around."

Carthan's release on October 13 fol-

lowed his lawyers' appeal to reduce his three-year sentence on a federal fraud conviction for allegedly allowing his signature to be used on a bank document by the man who admits he forged it. Carthan says he's innocent of that charge, too, but by being released on parole, he is barred from holding public office. His supporters vow to fight for his full exoneration and, as Arnett Lewis says, "to redouble our efforts to address the many other issues of mistreatment that face poor people in Mississippi and the nation."

## Legislators act on prison overcrowding

With state prisons bulging, advocates of alternatives to incarceration see new hope in recent actions by several Southern legislatures to stabilize or even decrease the number of people kept behind bars. The rationale for such actions generally involves combined pressures from:

- Overcrowding. A slew of successful lawsuits filed in the last decade by inmates and civil liberties groups have put many state prison systems under federal scrutiny for violations of constitutional protections of due process and against cruel and unusual punishment (see *SE*, Jan./Feb., 1983).
- Shrinking budgets. The price tag on new prisons is prohibitive; a 460-bed unit costs $36 million and takes six years to build. It already costs between $9,500 and $16,000 a year to incarcerate a person in the South.
- Public concern. Despite conservative calls for harsher sentencing, the work of prison reformers is helping create the political support necessary for officials like Dr. Hubert M. Clements, Deputy Commissioner for South Carolina's Department of Corrections, to declare, "People in prison are people and 98 percent of prisoners go back into the community. You can't deprive people of their rights while they are confined and then expect to release them as better people."

In response to these pressures, Southern legislatures in South Carolina, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas have authorized emergency release programs. The programs set a ceiling on the maximum number of prisoners the state system can safely handle, and they spell out specific procedures for the early release of nonviolent offenders when this ceiling is exceeded for a certain length of time. Similar powers have been granted in Georgia, but to avoid using the emergency release act, legislators also adopted parole guidelines to lower incarceration rates.

In Tennessee, a court order prompted the adoption of measures in October to reduce the prison population by a minimum of 1,200 over the next two years. By simply allowing prisoners to accumulate additional gain time, or good time, North Carolina decreased its prison population by 1,500 in eight months, and Florida cut its by 2,200 in six months.

Proponents of early release programs can also demonstrate that they do not endanger public safety, as some opponents charge. For example, a study in Florida of prisoners released as a result of a court order in the 1960s concluded: "Recidivism [the rate of ex-prisoners convicted of new crimes] among the group released early was significantly lower than among a similar group not released until their original sentences had expired."

The study's findings prompted Louie L. Wainwright, Director of Florida's Division of Corrections, to say, "This mass exodus from prison may prove that there are many inmates presently in prison who do not need to be there in order to protect society. It may prove that many more people can be safely released on parole without fear that they will commit new crimes."

But early release programs still don't address the source of the overcrowding problem, say reform advocates. The real solution lies in sending fewer people to jail. Recent experience in South Carolina illustrates their point.

Ranked number two behind Nevada in incarceration rate (270 per 100,000 people), South Carolina set its prison system capacity at 7,630 under the Prison Overcrowding Powers Act which went into effect July 16. The limit was exceeded for the next 30 days, and on August 16, the state Board of Corrections petitioned the governor to declare an overcrowding state of emergency. That action allowed correction officials to reduce prison terms of nonviolent offenders by up to 90 days and release 137 prisoners on September 2. But by then, the prison population exceeded the set limit by 309.

The following month, the number of prisoners again rose to 311 above the ceiling. This time the state chose a temporary solution by renovating a building to house 250 people. The cycle promises to repeat itself, with the state expected to reach its maximum level by the end of the year – unless it can reduce the number of offenders sent to jail in the first place.

## Need a job? Join the military, die abroad

Lebanon and Grenada have again highlighted the importance of the South's military bases for the projection of American firepower overseas. Troops in both operations came primarily from Fort Bragg and Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. Another group of Rangers in the Grenada invasion came from Fort Lewis, Washington, where Pacific News Service reports they had practiced the capture of an "enemy" runway and liberation of a building with civilian captives more than 20 days before the execution of Maurice Bishop, the incident that supposedly motivated U.S. intervention.

Whatever the rationale for the Lebanon and Grenada missions, the cost in American lives also fell disproportionately on the South. Of the 239 U.S. casualties known on November 8th, one half were soldiers with Southern "homes of record." No information as yet reveals if, as in Vietnam, a disproportionate number of the dead were black. The region still leads the nation in supplying more recruits to the military – about 30 percent come from the 10 states of the Southeast.

"That's not just because the South is more conservative politically," says Mandy Carter of the War Resisters League's Southeast office. "It's also because the South has a greater portion

of the nation's poor blacks and whites, the target group for the Pentagon's 'Be all you can be' ads which promise educational and career opportunities."

Reagan's transfer of billions of federal dollars from social service programs to the Pentagon also pushes more people into military service, or work for private defense contractors, as "the only game in town," says Carter.

U.S. Census figures show that 15 percent of all Americans now live below the poverty line, the highest number since 1964. The figure is 18 percent for Southerners and 36 percent for blacks.

While black households with two working parents have increased their income from 73 to 84 percent of the average white household's earnings from 1968 to 1981, these families are a true minority. The census shows that nearly one half of all black families are headed by women, and that 45 percent of black men and 55 percent of black women age 16 and older are unemployed or not in the workforce. Because of those numbers, 45 percent of black children under age 18 now live in poverty, making them prime targets for the U.S. military machine.

## North Carolina ranks first in racial assaults

Four years after five demonstrators were killed by Klan and Nazi gunmen in Greensboro, a new wave of racial violence has earned North Carolina the distinction of leading the U.S. in the number of Klan incidents. "Only Georgia rivals North Carolina in Klan growth," says Lyn Wells, coordinator for the National Anti-Klan Network. "But I consider North Carolina the most dangerous because the various Klan factions cooperate rather than compete as they do elsewhere."

She said the state has three paramilitary camps and an official Klan membership estimated at 1,600.

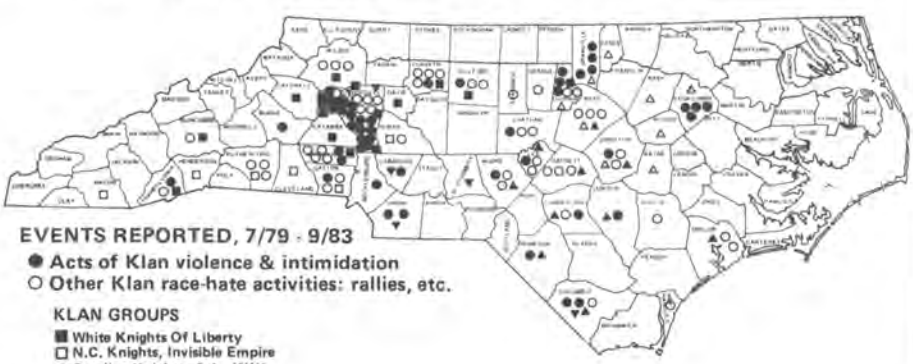
The number of racial assaults and race-hate demonstrations in North Carolina totals 108 since July, 1977, and has jumped from 14 in 1981 to 26 in 1982 to 60 in the first nine months of 1983. They include eight murders and 14 other shootings and knife attacks, plus cross burnings on individuals' lawns, threatening phone calls, brandishing of weapons, and physical harassment of children.

A study of these acts by the Anti-Klan Network reveals a pattern of individual assaults following public rallies by Klan factions, especially in Iredell and Alexander counties, where the most number of incidents has occurred. According to Leah Wise, director of Southerners for Economic Justice, the targets of racial violence are most frequently (1) interracial couples, including the killings of two black men with white girl friends in Gastonia and Durham; and (2) black workers in areas of high job loss (such as the west-central part of the state) and blacks seeking positions formerly held by whites (ranging from higher paying factory jobs to prison guards).

Anti-Klan leaders said state and local law enforcement officials refuse to acknowledge a pattern of racially motivated violence in the state. The Attorney General and State Bureau of Investigation have more authority to act against motorcycle gangs than the Klan. Speaking at a press conference that included representatives from several human rights groups, Wise called for coordinated state prosecution of Klan-related incidents, barring weapons from their public rallies, and vigorous condemnation of Klan violence by the state's political leaders.

"The sole official voice that is heard is that of Senator Jesse Helms, who is leading the charge in the opposite direction – toward polarizing the races and fueling the fires of the Klan and other racist elements," said Wise.

With the 1984 Helms-Hunt election expected to rival the 1950 Willis Smith-Frank Porter Graham duel for racial demagoguery, her message carried an ominous warning.




## Federal aid ends for plutonium economy

Opponents of nuclear energy scored another victory in October when Congress pulled the plug on funding for the Clinch River Breeder Reactor at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The Barnwell Reprocessing facility in South Carolina suffered a similar fate in April when the House Science and Technology Committee cut its funds. The two projects were designed to show that nuclear technology could reprocess spent fuel from commercial reactors into plutonium for a breeder reactor, which could then generate electricity while producing more fuel than it consumed. With the lobbying strength of Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee and such nuclear-related companies as Bechtel, Boeing, and Westinghouse, the alluring idea of a "Plutonium Economy" sucked up $2.5 billion before Congress finally stopped subsidizing both projects.

Another South Carolina nuclear facility was one of dozens of protest sites during the October 21-24 international campaign to stop deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe. The Savannah River Plant (SRP) near Aiken makes plutonium and tritium for all U.S. nuclear weapons; operated by DuPont for the Department of Energy, it boasts the largest payroll for a single factory in

the state. On October 24, 79 demonstrators showed their solidarity with more than a million protesters in Europe by blocking two entrances to SRP. Arresting officers wore white gloves, reportedly as protection against germs from the demonstrators – an apparent swipe at claims by protesters that pollution from the plant accounts for the increased incidence of disease and infant mortality in the area. To date, no study of the long-term environmental effects of the SRP has been conducted.

## Updates and short takes

**GROWERS RETALIATE.** *Southern Exposure* staff member and photographer Joe Pfister was one of four people arrested in late October in the latest clash between North Carolina growers and opponents of their slave-like treatment of farm laborers (see *SE*, Sept./Oct., 1983). As part of a federal suit by migrants against Carson Barnes, the largest sweet potato grower in the U.S., the team of four obtained permission to inspect Barnes's labor camps and document violations of housing codes. The investigators (Chip Hughes, Pfister, Chuck Eppinette, Ted Outwater) found a host of violations, from overcrowding and toilets that did not work to the discovery of a woman and child padlocked inside a room.

Two days after their visit, the camp manager who escorted them swore out a warrant for their arrest on state charges of breaking and entering. A trial is set for early December in rural Nash County, and although the fact that the men were acting under federal orders would seem to put the law in their favor, nobody familiar with the use of North Carolina courts for political harassment can dismiss the seriousness of the charges. More on the case later; meanwhile, note Chip Hughes's article on farm labor beginning page 55.

**WHAT COLOR IS BLOOD?** Louisiana lawmakers in July repealed a 1970 law defining anyone with more than one thirty-second of "Negro blood" as black or "colored." A new law allows a person to change the race listed on birth records by presenting a "preponderance of evidence" to support the change, such as the testimony of family members or a doctor. Leo Frazier, who represents a racially mixed district in New Orleans, says he sponsored the repeal of the old law because "Louisiana was made the laughing stock of the nation" following a highly publicized case in which the wife of a prominent white businessman tried to change her birth certificate to read "white" instead of "col." for "colored."

The woman's lawyer opposed the repeal because he said it left no standard for defining or disputing a racial designation. "If your records say you're colored," said Brian Begue, "then your blue eyes, blond hair, white skin and sister's color don't matter, because we don't know what makes a person colored." Louisiana has been using various formulas to classify a person's race since the 1700s, and while some legislators think the law change will get the state out of the business of determining race, it's doubtful the debate will disappear so easily.

**ALL IN THE FAMILY.** A number of the largest supermarket chains in the U.S. are now foreign-owned – A & P (West Germany), Grand Union (England), and Giant Foods (Netherlands). But Winn-Dixie, the nation's fourth largest chain with $6.8 billion in annual sales, is still tightly controlled by the Davis family of Jacksonville, Florida. Robert D. Davis, 51, became the new chairman in October, succeeding his uncle James E. Davis, 76, one of four brothers who founded the company. James's son, A. Dane Davis, 38, is president and chief executive officer of the 1,200-store chain, which has its largest concentration in the Southeast. Altogether the Davis family controls 37.3 percent of Winn-Dixie's stock, bringing them $23,800,000 in annual income from dividend pay-outs alone.

**SEEN ANY GOOD NEWS?**

There's no reason to let us be the ones who sift through the press to choose the material to include in the Southern News Roundup. If you see a feature article in your local newspaper or a magazine that sheds light on what progressive Southerners are doing – or are up against – send it to us. Send the complete article, date and name of publication (with its address if possible) along with your name and address, and whatever additional comments or interpretations you care to include, to: Southern News Roundup, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.** Unpublished data collected by the U.S. Labor Department shows that affirmative action requirements on companies doing business with the federal government successfully promoted the employment of blacks, women, and Hispanics. The Reagan administration plans to weaken the requirements, and Labor Department officials have thus far refused to release the report. But a copy obtained by the *New York Times* says that from 1974 to 1980, the rate of minority employment grew 20 percent among businesses with federal contracts and only 12 percent among companies not covered by the affirmative action rules. The study was based on a survey of 77,000 factories employing more than 20 million people; between 20,000 and 30,000 companies, including almost all the largest corporations in the nation, hold government contracts which require them to take specific steps to hire and promote women and members of minority groups.

**HOBBY'S LAST HOPE.** Former North Carolina AFL-CIO president Wilbur Hobby is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review his 1981 fraud and conspiracy conviction in connection with a CETA contract he administered through his private printing company (*SE*, Jan./Feb., 1982). If the Court denies his petition for review, Hobby faces a $40,000 fine and an 18-month sentence at the federal prison hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. There he would join his friend Frank Thompson, former chair of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee and a victim of the Abscam sting. Hobby's diabetes and back problems, which delayed the original trial, continue to trouble him, but he has resumed work with his old employer, American Tobacco, in the shipping department. "I don't have the money to pay that fine," he says, "and if I don't keep working I'll leave my family in even worse shape."

**Facing South**

**a syndicated column: voices of tradition in a changing region**

# Ira Okraseed

JACKSBORO, TX – After Ira Campsey mailed out the thousandth packet of his special okra seed to an interested correspondent, his friends dubbed him Ira Okraseed. Like the legendary Johnny Appleseed, Campsey has taken unselfish pleasure in spreading his seeds throughout the nation – and in Campsey's case, the world!

Campsey's is no ordinary okra seed. It's a giant strain which he developed himself through selective cross-pollination. Unlike ordinary okra pods, which become very tough and fibrous after growing more than a few inches, Campsey's strain grows both long and tender. "We've cooked okra pods 22 inches long that were still tender," he explains.

Campsey's okra project began in the 1960s when he was a poorly paid public school teacher, augmenting his salary by working summers with the vegetable harvest in Texas and Mexico. Pickled okra sold in quart jars was very popular, and Campsey hoped he could get a raise out of his employer by presenting him with an okra strain the right size for those jars.

After obtaining some guidelines on cross-pollination techniques from a university, Campsey set to work on his new scheme. At the time he was buying cucumbers, starting with the harvest in Mexico and moving on up through Texas's Rio Grande Valley as the season warmed. He talked farmers along the way into planting his okra seeds, and after much trial, error, and selection he finally came up with a plant that satisfied him. His new strain produced plants as high as 18 feet, with pods ranging from 10 to 16 inches – and tender from end to end.

Campsey never got the raise he wanted, but he considers himself richly rewarded in other ways. He and his wife began sharing their seed right from the first crop, giving away the last nine seeds of it to a Swiss family with a promise of more later. But ever-increasing publicity has brought more than 2,290 requests from gardeners around the world.

"I've sent my seed to all 50 states and many foreign countries, including India, Korea, and Indonesia," says Campsey. In 1981, one of his friends, a member of a United-Nations-sponsored agricultural project, introduced the seed in a poverty-stricken African country, where the seed became a favorite. And an Alaskan gardener who planted some of the seed in his greenhouse there – thousands of miles north of the heat-loving okra's normal environment – reported that his crop grew 18 feet tall.

*Illustration by Frank Holyfield*

People who write asking for Campsey's seed usually also want to know how they can preserve the bountiful giant pods.

"We select pods five inches long or less to freeze, if we plan to serve them boiled. We spread these pods whole on a foam tray, freeze them, and then store them in plastic freezer bags," Campsey explains. "But the bigger pods are excellent to freeze for frying. Wash them with the stems on and parboil the whole pod three or four minutes. Drain them and chill them in ice water. Then cut the chilled pods into half-inch or so chunks, arrange on a tray and freeze." These chunks can then be stored in a freezer bag, ready to shake out into some meal or flour, and then into the frying pan.

Like most instances of true sharing, the Campseys' seed-spreading has become a two-way street. They've received many gifts of unusual and valuable seed from other gardeners. An Oregon man sent five seeds found in the craw of a wild goose; three of these germinated and developed into an excellent green bean. Another offering was old-time flint corn, the kind early Americans used for grinding into meal. And then came some canteloupe seed which produced a beautiful orange-fleshed fruit rivaling Texas's famous Pecos variety.

Ira Okraseed continues to be amazed by the good will and friendship his okra seed project has generated. "Why, folks all over the country have asked us out to visit them," he exclaims, "and some folks even send extra postage for those who forgot it."

Perhaps the sharing of valuable seed such as Ira Campsey's mineral-rich giant okra is one answer to the hunger and misery which plague the world today.

*– DOROTHY PRUNTY*
*freelance*
*Jacksboro, TX*

**Editor's Note**: The Campseys will send okra seeds to those who provide self-addressed stamped envelopes; their address is: 832 W. Union, Jacksboro, TX 76056.

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## ALASKA

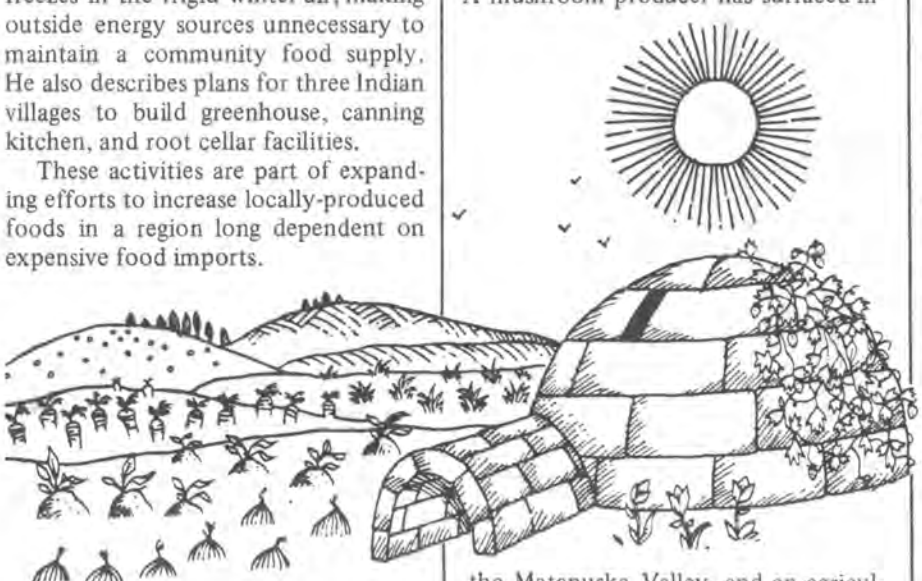
# In Cold Storage

*– Kenneth Meter*

On a gravelly vacant lot not far from the shore of Alaska's Kotzebue Sound, Kathryn Devereaux hoists the lid of a wood frame box covered with plastic. Inside, a thick stand of turnip greens greets the sunshine. This is one of nearly 100 gardens she has helped start in the region.

In Fairbanks, blueprints are scattered on a desk. Don Tomlin, agriculture director for the Tanana Chiefs Council, points with a calloused finger in outlining a plan to construct "passive freezers" – food lockers containing dozens of tanks filled with brine which freezes in the frigid winter air, making outside energy sources unnecessary to maintain a community food supply. He also describes plans for three Indian villages to build greenhouse, canning kitchen, and root cellar facilities.

These activities are part of expanding efforts to increase locally-produced foods in a region long dependent on expensive food imports.



Raising food isn't new to Alaska, but when modern air services to the "lower 48" and in Alaska made imports easier, local production languished. Decades of booming development and a general lack of public planning contributed to agricultural decline.

Alaskans, once familiar with a seemingly endless supply of wild foods such as salmon, berries, caribou, and seal, were informed by the state in 1980 that they were 95 percent dependent on food from outside. Furthermore, they relied on a food distribution system that at times maintained only a four-day supply in the state. This was a shocking revelation to the traditionally independent Alaskans.

Grassroots groups launched many programs looking toward food independence. In Fairbanks, community gardens and a farmers' market have been organized. Twelve villages in the Kobuk River area are tilling gardens under a program sponsored by the Maniilaq Association in Kotzebue. Eleven potential meat processors have submitted plans to develop a slaughtering plant.

Renewed dairy competition is starting in Anchorage, and gardens are flourishing once again in the lower Kuskokwim Valley, with potatoes and onions shipped to villages by river-boat. A mushroom producer has surfaced in the Matanuska Valley, and an agriculture school is being constructed in Ruby, on the Yukon River.

Many of these projects have relied on state funding. Others have developed entirely from local private initiatives. With the exception of the slaughtering plant, the programs have had only token aid from the Alaska Agriculture Action Council, the state's farm policy agency.

Local production also has taken root without the benefit of strong technical support. In fact, some of the more advanced local efforts are hundreds of miles from established distribution systems. Innovations rely heavily on local people. "Nobody makes potato planters or small grain threshers," Tomlin said, "so we made our own. Every village is different in its approach to gardening. In most cases it's the women who have pushed for growing food."

Nick Carney, head of the state division of agriculture, is one of the officials championing small-scale production. He is preparing a proposal for a $1 million program to consolidate village gardening projects. "The state has done more for small-scale farming than most people realize," Carney said. "We have sold 80,000 acres for grain farming and 100,000 acres for small farms. The state doesn't get much publicity for these small projects."

Experts say it would take at least 10, maybe 30, years for export agriculture to get on its feet. Meanwhile, it seems likely that local food production efforts will continue. Once Alaska again raises some of its own food and shows it can produce a surplus, exports will be a realistic goal for this giant state. □

 *Kenneth Meter is a free-lance journalist specializing in agricultural issues.*

## TANZANIA

# Rodale Connection

*– Robert Rodale*

When David Miller was appointed U.S. ambassador to Tanzania, his wife Millie told him: "Farming is important in Tanzania. Before we go there, we've got to visit the Rodale place, because they know about that kind of farming." David said that they "got horribly lost" trying to find Maxatawny, Pennsylvania, but eventually made it.

Scene changes from Maxatawny to

the port city of Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian capital. One evening, there is a cocktail reception for the diplomatic community. Present is Joan Wicken, an English woman who has served for 21 years as the personal assistant to Tanzanian President Julius K. Nyerere. Like him, she's a socialist. Nyerere is a towering leader in the Third World, but "Joan makes up one-third of the government," according to local political observers.


Mollie Miller hands Wicken a copy of *The Rodale Book of Composting.*

Next day, President Nyerere calls his minister of agriculture late in the day. "Come right away," he says.

A quick lecture on the virtues of composting ensues. "We need to learn more about this," the president says. "Bring the Rodale people here."

Minister leaves, without book, without clear knowledge of what is going on. Calls David Miller, American ambassador, and asks for help.

Sunday night Dar es Salaam time, Monday morning Eastern Daylight Time, David Miller calls Dick Harwood at the Rodale Research Center.

"I realize I can't order you to come to Tanzania," Miller says to Harwood. "But I will anyway. Come here right away, and bring more books."

So that's how five of us from the Rodale Research Center found ourselves in Morogoro, Tanzania, one Monday morning in May. The U.S. Agency for International Development had sent us there in response to President Nyerere's request. The workshop on organic farming that we had planned jointly with Tanzanian agricultural experts was opening. Before us lay the challenge of helping the millions of small farmers in that country become more self-reliant. We were not bringing food. We were bringing the ideas that could help Tanzanian farmers produce more, using their own resources.

For me, the highlight of the whole experience is on the first day of the week-long conference. President Nyerere walks into a hall filled with 320 participants. Only 200 were expected. I speak briefly about the historical significance of a whole country being on the verge of endorsing organic methods. And I think of J.I. Rodale's struggle against ridicule and the frequent statements about how many people would starve if the world "went organic." Now, we see that the poorest countries have to go organic *to be able to eat,* and we can expect them to eat well, too. I think also about how many other countries will probably follow Tanzania's lead. Never before has a country's president instructed his agricultural leadership to devote primary effort to organic methods.

The scale on which life is lived in Third World countries is often hard for Americans to comprehend. In rural Africa, life is lived very close to the earth. There is the "shamba," which we would call a garden. There is the heavy hoe, and the simple house, and some cotton clothes. Life-threatening diseases like malaria are constant companions. Annual family income averages $300.

The economy in Tanzania is poor, and getting worse. Little or no hard currency is available to buy oil, chemicals, fertilizers, machinery, and other raw materials. New factories built with foreign aid are working at 10 percent or 20 percent capacity. Tires are wearing out on cars.

Food is expensive. One chicken costs $20. A baby chick costs $2. The people don't look thin and emaciated, but much conversation is about the lack of food. Not just poor people, but everyone is concerned. You hear about city people with good jobs going back to their villages to farm so they can hope to get more to eat.

In Tanzania, the attempt to overcome this quickly has meant trying to go from farming totally by hand – without even using animal draft power – to the use of tractors, automatic harvesting machines, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. Many countries from around the world have sent help to Tanzania. The Chinese built a big railroad. Canada sent the people and equipment to create a large wheat farm. The United States, along with other countries, tried to wean farmers from their hoes and start them using tractors, chemical fertilizers and all the other trappings of American-style agriculture. But most farmers who've tried have failed. Their machines break down. There are no spare parts. Costs are very high. And the prices paid for their farm products are too low for the farmers to make a profit.

While that is happening, the babies keep coming very fast. The people are growing hungrier. Trees are being torn from hillsides often miles away by people searching for firewood for cooking. There is no money left even to pay the freight for low-cost food shipped in from the United States under the Public Law 480 program which distributes American surplus grains.

What Tanzania is doing today is not returning to old-fashioned and less efficient methods of the past. It is moving beyond the wasteful ways that have led to so many current problems, and is looking within itself for self-reliance and possibly even self-sufficiency. □

*Reprinted from* ***The New Farm: The Magazine of Regenerative Agriculture****, 33 E. Minor St., Emmaus, PA 18049.*

## Right to Eat Network

This summer, the Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP), Oxfam America, Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC), and other organizations came together in an informal coalition called the Right to Eat Network. The basic principle of the network is that "Because the 'economic recovery' does not address the inequalities at the root of poverty, it will not ease the hunger of hundreds of millions of the earth's people."

Among the activities proposed for the new network are: getting local officials to hold public hearings, taking journalists on tours of low-income neighborhoods, and gathering local statistics on who is not being helped by economic recovery.

For more information, contact CALC, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038; (212) 964-6730. □

# OUR FOOD, OUR COMMON GROUND

photo © 1977 by John Spragens, Jr.

"The food that satisfies hunger," says an oft-quoted passage of *Don Quixote*, is one of those needs and wants "that equalize the shepherd and the king, the simpleton and the sage."

Much has changed in the four centuries since these words were written, but food remains our common ground. Unlike the air we breathe, food does not come to us without effort, and it never came to the shepherd in the same quantity and quality as to the king. But Cervantes's shepherd was less dependent for food on factors beyond his or her control than almost any of us today, and that is not a change for the better.

This issue of *Southern Exposure* is our contribution toward recovering control over our food – its quality, production, distribution, and variety – and, therefore, toward asserting greater control over our lives in a time that finds our world on the edge of catastrophe. If that sounds apocalyptic, examine for a moment these signs of our crisis:

• The "hunger problem," never solved but at least assuaged by federal programs like food stamps, has re-emerged as a major issue. The number of hungry people is certainly on the rise. One of the usual indicators is the number of people living at or below official poverty levels; the figure was 34.4 million in 1982, up from 24.7 million in 1977. A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) report quotes an official of the National Council of Churches who works directly with emergency food programs as saying in December, 1982, "The hunger problem nationally is three times – and in some places four times – worse than it was a year ago."

• The loss of farmland to industrial development, urban sprawl, erosion, and other environmental damage continues unabated. According to the National Agricultural Lands Study, we are losing three million acres every year from a 1967 cropland base of 450 million acres.

• Local variety and choice in food have given way to the pervasive presence of national supermarket chains, restaurant franchises, and corporate brands of over-processed, over-advertised, additive-laden food. Commodity specialization in production means that most of the food grown in the South is shipped elsewhere while most of the food eaten here is grown thousands of miles away. This marketing system deprives consumers of fresh local foods, deprives farmers of local markets, and inflates food prices with the cost of transportation, storage, and countless middleman operations.

• Soaring energy prices also inflate the cost of food through the cost of fuel for running farm

machinery and the cost of the petroleum-based agricultural fertilizers and chemicals that U.S. farmers have become dependent on.

• Lower quality and higher prices also result from conglomerate domination of the food industry: only 50 of the nation's 30,000 food processing companies share 90 percent of the industry's profits. More than 60 cents of our food dollar goes to corporations that have no direct contact with the farmer or consumer; the figure jumps to 90 cents or more in cases of highly processed foods like canned spaghetti, frozen french fries, or sandwich cookies.

• The capital needed to begin farming – acquisition of land, equipment, and supplies now averages about $500,000 – is largely beyond the reach of the young person who wants to farm. And the increasing inability of existing farmers to earn enough to pay their annual debts means the independent family farmer is a dying species.

• A developing water crisis also threatens to engulf us. In some places, such as parts of Texas, we are running out of water in highly irrigated farming areas. In others, water quality is deteriorating thanks to industrial waste and agricultural chemicals, and healthy drinking water is available only to those who can pay a premium for it.

• Despite increasing awareness of nutrition and growing interest in natural foods, most people's eating habits remain unbalanced and contribute to the high incidence of diseases that are linked at least in part to diet – from diabetes and high blood pressure to cancer and heart disease.

Such a list could go on and on. The "farm crisis" is fast becoming a national media cliche. We turn on the network news or open *Newsweek* to poignant stories of family farms on the auction block; the local news runs a week-long series on black land loss; we are again seeing magazine articles and books about people in the U.S. who aren't just hungry but starving. Yet we still have the paradox of overproduction; we export food; we store or give away huge amounts of surplus commodities; we still subsidize nonproduction; we use food as a foreign policy weapon.

All of these problems are real, but they are not free-standing or unrelated. Hungry, malnourished poor people, bankrupt farmers, and middle-income people doling out ever-larger shares of their income to the supermarket chains are all victims of the same fundamentally diseased agricultural economy. The popular media fail to help us understand that the roots of this crisis lie in the way our system of food production and marketing is dominated by corporate conglomerates.

Likewise, we rarely hear of the many things people are doing, on their own initiative, to help themselves become more self-reliant, to identify and satisfy real needs with local resources, to forge alliances between consumer and producer based on their common needs, to form cooperative enterprises and reduce their dependence on the existing crisis-prone food system. *Our Food, Our Common Ground* is intended to encourage and support people's efforts toward more food self-reliance.

In these pages we will meet some people caught up in a net of dependence from which there may seem to be no escape. The South's biggest agribusiness is the raising and processing of poultry; corporate control of it is all but complete, leaving the farmers who grow the birds and the plant workers who slaughter and process them in a powerless situation which we explore beginning on page 76. But we also explore some of their efforts to escape this powerlessness by banding together in growers' organizations and in unions. We will also meet the farmworkers of the East Coast migrant stream. If anything their situation is one of even less power, described beginning on page 55. But here, too, there is some hope – and even some success – in farmworkers' efforts to organize themselves.

*photo © 1977 by John Spragens, Jr.*

Other people we will meet in these pages have taken positive steps toward self-reliance that have met with more immediate success:

- Organic farmers who are freeing themselves of dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to grow healthy food – see page 14.
- A man with a plan to comfortably support a family on a small diversified farm – see page 27.
- A woman who remembers a farm life of near-total self-sufficiency – see page 30.
- Kids who are learning how to eat what's nutritious and a doctor who says good health is in your power, if you'll only take charge – see page 34.
- Three groups of people who have applied time-tested principles of economic cooperation to the production or purchase of food – see page 41.
- A community of eighteenth-century Southern Indians who knew how to meet their food needs naturally, without destroying their land – see page 66.
- A woman who can teach you to gather the good things to eat that nature provides in the wild – see page 70.
- A state agriculture commissioner who is trying to take his state's food economy outside the corporate mainstream, gaining new markets and decent incomes for farmers and providing better food at lower prices for consumers – see page 92.

These people and programs by no means exhaust the supply of ideas and people working for greater self-reliance. But far too much of our food activists' time and energies are spent these days combatting the first sign of crisis listed in the litany above – the "new" hunger problem – the most damning sign of all in a society of abundance.

The new hunger problem, as many have noted, is one outgrowth of the disastrous social and economic policies adopted by the administration of President Ronald Reagan. As we said, more than 30 million live in poverty. Twelve million are officially unemployed and at least two million more have stopped looking for jobs. Uncounted additional millions more who want full-time work have only part-time work, or can't support their families with full-time minimum-wage jobs. Through his programs, and transfers of public funds, Reagan has created a whole new population of victims, people not accustomed to dependence on the likes of soup kitchens for a decent meal.

The GAO report mentioned above describes the new profile of the hungry: "No longer are food centers serving only their traditional clientele of the chronically poor, derelicts, alcoholics, and mentally ill persons. . . . This breed of 'new poor' is made up of individuals who were employed and perhaps financially stable just a short time ago. As contrasted with the chronically poor, more of them are members of families, young and able-bodied, and have homes in the suburbs. They now find themselves without work, with unemployment benefits and savings accounts exhausted, and with diminishing hopes of being able to continue to meet their mortgage, automobile, and other payments which they committed themselves to when times were better."

*photo © 1979 by John Spragens, Jr.*

The economic times may get better again, and this new population of the hungry may get back on their feet. But they will remain people with some first-hand knowledge of hunger and poverty, and that is the one thing we can find to say about this state of affairs that amounts to a ray of hope. We must ensure that this new group of victims joins us in the fight for economic democracy in America.

While it is true that President Reagan has made things worse, he has been working within a system that has never provided enough jobs for all who want to work and has never provided enough food for people on the economic fringe. Food stamps and other programs introduced in the past two decades reduced the suffering, but it is our undemocratic economic system that keeps people hungry. If we want to change that, we must stop simply raging against the powers that be – the corporate farmers, the supermarket chains, the commodities traders, the foreclosing bankers, politics as usual in Washington, and all the rest.


photo © 1983 by John Spragens, Jr.

We must also act to take control for ourselves. If we learn anything from the people we meet in *Our Food, Our Common Ground,* it is that individually and collectively we have a great capacity to create our own set of institutions to produce, market, and purchase our food. The key is decentralized economic cooperation, as Jim Hightower tells us in the interview that begins on page 92. He is speaking of the creation of regional cooperative farmers' markets, but the idea applies across the board: "giving real economic power to people and making available channels through which they can gain that economic power . . . creating an alternative that's real."

He goes on to contrast this approach with the classic liberal one, which would be "to bust up the wholesale markets . . . to do something negative to the marketplace. [We say] you need to do something positive to the marketplace. You need to expand it, and give the little people a way around the blockage in the marketplace rather than spending all your time fighting a negative battle."

This is a lesson taught by the Populists of a century ago. If we can learn from their successes as well as their failures, we may hope to use our experiences of cooperative economic activity as the base for independent, cooperative political activity and for a movement for an economic democracy in which the decisions about who will have how much – food, work, dignity, power – are made by the people. Until enough of us stand on common ground to demand the right to make these decisions, the hungry will always be with us.

– Linda Rocawich
for the *Southern Exposure* staff

# Healthy Food in a living landscape

## Organic Farming in the South

BY DEBBY WECHSLER

In Front Royal, Virginia, A.P. Thomson operates a 35-acre apple orchard, called "Golden Acres." At age 73, he's been growing apples without the use of chemicals since 1947. He's still planting trees – a younger generation of semi-dwarf trees, including many of the new Liberty variety, highly resistant to the major apple diseases, is growing among his mature standard apple trees, mostly Yorks and Golden Delicious.

I picked apples for A.P. for two seasons and pruned trees at Golden Acres for one spring. The apples were big and handsome, the best-tasting I've ever eaten. The tree-ripened Golden Delicious were sweet and crisp, with a light hollow feel and a porous sound in your hand. The orchard was a magical place, full of life, a joy to work in, a vivid contrast to other orchards where dangerous agricultural chemicals are used. In a conventional cherry orchard in Michigan where I had picked cherries one summer, no grass grew in the disked sand between the trees, nothing living moved, no birds sang, and the spray residues were black on your fingers at the end of the day and bitter in your mouth.

A.P. Thomson relies upon his decades of attention to soil building to grow healthy trees in a living landscape. He rebuilt the exhausted soil of his family's farm by experimenting with legume cover crops and the introduction of earthworms. "The whole thing is based on the soil," he says. "You have to feed the soil, get humus into the soil, furnish it with what it needs to be alive."

He uses concentrates of seaweed to provide trace minerals, the bacteria *bacilus thuringiensis* and a population of parasitic *trichogramma* wasps to control insects, and a judicious use of sulfur as a fungicide.

In Leesburg, Florida, 76-year old Lee McComb has been raising oranges and grapefruit organically since 1953 (see profile on page 20). He started out originally with a compost business and bought his first orange grove to demonstrate the value of this compost. His grapefruit groves in the heart of Florida's citrus district have something of a wild, unkempt look– the tall trees loom out of shaggy, unmowed land. Like Thomson, McComb has spent many years building up the soil, spreading hundreds of tons of his blended compost. The surface of his fruit is rough, and lightly mottled with gray from superficial fungus and citrus rust, unlike the brilliantly colored commercial citrus (sprayed, washed, and often dyed). But the taste is superb.

At opposite ends of the South, orchardists A.P. Thomson and Lee McComb are the grand old men of the region's organic agriculture. They stand out like landmark trees in an agricultural landscape over which the chemical winds sweep with increasing ferocity. Chlordane, Toxaphene, Malathion, Parathion, Guthion, Treflan, Aatrex . . . today's agricultural supply store is a chemical smorgasbord. It means confusion to farmers, hazard to consumers, profits to agribusiness, and threats to the future of the land itself. By our modern agricultural practices we continue to lose topsoil, soil fertility, and environmental quality; we also waste away energy resources. These often-quoted statistics tell the story: the South loses one inch of topsoil every nine years, we use six calories of energy to produce one calorie of food, we use six times as much pesticide now as we used 30 years ago but have twice as much crop loss.

Southern organic farmers are trying to do it differently. They are fertilizing with natural rock powders, seaweed concentrates, fish emulsion, manure, and compost. They are planting legumes as cover crops and practicing crop rotations. They depend on cultivation, hand weeding, and crop rotations to control weeds, and on biological pest control instead of pesticides. Slowly and with difficulty, organic agriculture is developing a body of practice that combines both old and new with increasing refinement and understanding.

The word "organic" – and what constitutes "organic farming" – trouble both advocates and critics of the more natural farming methods. Thomson prefers to describe his apples as "biologically grown," a phrase which he feels emphasizes the soil-building process and the holistic management of his orchard. "Organic," however, is in more general use. Formal definitions of the word vary radically, as evidenced by a 1980 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study of organic farming – which devoted a chapter to discussion of various definitions. But the phrase generally describes farming that avoids the use of chemicals and employs natural biological methods.*

The same USDA study found that most organic farms are "productive, efficient, and well-managed." The researchers reported that organic growers are quite successful in controlling weeds and insect pests and that "many of the current methods of soil and crop management practiced by organic farmers are those which have been cited as the best management practices for controlling soil erosion, minimizing water pollution, and conserving energy."

There aren't a lot of organic farmers in the South – probably just a few hundred full-time farmers or serious part-timers. There are many more farming at a subsistence level, doing a bit of market gardening, or in their first few years of getting started and not at full productivity yet.

There are, of course, some farmers who have been untouched by the chemical winds and the technological changes that swept agriculture following World War II. The winds of change die to a whisper by the time they reach some of the South's nooks and crannies. In Kentucky, according to Hal Hamilton of the New Farm Coalition, "there are a lot of old-time farmers that probably grow everything organically except their tobacco." Scattered communities of Mennonite and Amish farmers hold to the old ways. And there are small farmers, both black and white, who still make do as their parents did with the manure of their mules, a dusting of lime or ashes, and the labor of their children to eke out a meager crop.

But, due to the ever-present advertisements in the media, the relentless proliferation of products in every grocery and feed store, the messages of the extension service, and the example of neighbors, few such backwaters remain. A couple of years ago, when I held a compost-making demonstration for a community of black small farmers and gardeners, one woman came up to me afterwards saying, "You know, my daddy always did that with the cotton stalks at the end of the season." "Why did he stop?" I asked. "Well," she said, "the stuff in the bags was so cheap, then, and it was so easy."

LEE McCOMB

photo by Cheryl Hiers

These days, a more self-conscious organic agriculture is growing throughout the South. Today's organic farmers turn to the old-timers for their advice. More often they adapt a body of experience from other parts of the country or the world, as well as experiment on their own.

"Organic agriculture is harder in the South," says grower Tim McAller, who raises vegetables near Durham, North Carolina. "The hot weather just cooks the organic matter out of your soil so that it's hard to build it up and keep it at a good level. And the long growing season and mild winters mean that we have a lot more generations of pests and weeds to contend with."

The new wave of environmental consciousness and interest in more "natural" life-styles came late to the South; there are fewer homesteaders, fewer food co-ops and natural food stores, fewer organic farmers, and smaller, weaker marketing and information networks to support these farmers. The South's agricultural past may also have slowed the development of organic agriculture.

Southern farming, especially in the old cotton and tobacco lands, has a history of absentee landlordism, of sharecropping and tenant farming, that has lessened the sense of ownership, stewardship, and responsibility

*The USDA study finally settled on this: "Organic farming is a production system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, and livestock crop rotations. To the maximum extent feasible, organic farming systems rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, legumes, green manures, off-farm organic wastes, mechanical cultivation, mineral-bearing rocks, and aspects of biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and tilth, to supply plant nutrients, and to control insects, weeds, and other pests." (USDA *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming*, 1980; page 9.)

among both owners and tenants.

The South also has a long history of growing cash crops that make heavy demands on soil fertility. The land has been farmed exploitatively and colonially for centuries. Often the beginning organic farmer must invest years of reclamation in a land that has been farmed to exhaustion and then abandoned to scrub. "It takes at least three years to even begin to get the land into shape," says Tim McAller.

And yet, across the South, organic farmers are raising a full spectrum of crops: vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, livestock. My own obscure specialty is cherry tomatoes. There's an organic herb farm in Luray, Virginia, a Christmas tree grower in West Jefferson, North Carolina. The huge Arrowhead Mills operation run by Frank Ford in the Texas Panhandle is one of the largest growers, processors, and distributors of organic grains, flours, and beans in the natural food business. These organic farmers are young and old, native to the South and transplants, novice and experienced, on rented land, family land, purchased land – it's hard to make generalizations.

Though most practitioners operate relatively small farms, organic farming is beginning to attract some larger row-crop farmers – those family farmers with several hundred acres under cultivation, with the John Deere caps, the grain bins, the large tractors, and a mortgage from the Federal Land Bank.

Frank Stancil has farmed all his life. Three years ago he was raising 400 acres of soybeans on his farm in middle Tennessee. Now he's cut back to a diversified 200 acres of beans, small grains, and hay, plus two-and-a-half acres of vegetables and five acres of sweet potatoes, and is making a transition to organic methods. "In the beginning it was cost," he says, explaining why he's changing methods. "I was spending $12,000 to $15,000 a year on chemicals and it was entirely too much. I was just getting broker and broker."

Stancil is trying to develop a good rotation and has become a dealer for the natural farm supplies he uses. "So far, I'm not better off financially, but I'm confident that this season I'll have the best year financially we've had in five or six years. I'm still dependent on small amounts of herbicides and nitrogen fertilizer. I don't have access to a lot of manure, so I may have to use minimal amounts of milder forms of chemical fertilizers, but I think in three to five years I can be relatively independent, especially of pesticides. It's been very difficult getting information. I first went up to the Rodale experimental farm in Pennsylvania, and I liked what I saw, but the information I picked up, I just couldn't put it all together. I'm just now to the point when all this muddy water's starting to clear up for me and I can see to apply what I've learned."

Few of today's organic farmers turn to their methods for economic reasons alone. They are motivated also by concern over environmental and health hazards, by philosophies of responsibility and stewardship for the land, by humility towards the processes and purposes of nature. "It's a way of life," says A.P. Thomson. Bellevue Gardens, a cooperative organic produce farm in north central Florida, writes in its brochure, " We see organic farming, with its emphasis on nurturing and protecting the Earth, as a spiritual and political act." When Frank Stancil says, "It's just a matter of time until we see a lot more farmers converting," his image of conversion is one that occurs frequently in conversations with organic farmers. Neither indicating an ungrounded act of faith nor a simple change of methods, the word instead describes a necessary change in understanding and attitude from prevailing mentalities.

*photo courtesy Mother Earth News*

A.P. THOMSON

Cal Huge is another row-crop farmer in transition. He grew up on a farm in Nebraska, then practiced law in Ohio. Six years ago, he and his wife bought an 1,800-acre farm near Columbia, South Carolina, where, after farming strictly by the chemical book for two years, he began a transition to organic methods.

"What I think got me really started thinking about it was two things: first, the more I watched what we did and what we had to handle in the way of chemicals, it seemed like every time we turned around to do something, we had to find a chemical to do it. And then when it rained, the ground was like concrete – we had to rotary hoe every field to get the beans up. Two years after we started this transition program, we don't have that problem. We haven't had to rotary hoe a bean or corn crop to get it out of the ground, and the neighbors have.

"Second, I'm convinced that the whole farm belongs to the Lord, it doesn't belong to me, and he can't want us to treat it the way the chemicals treat it. I think that we are just very slowly – more rapidly in recent years – poisoning ourselves. We wanted to get away from that.

"The transition has not been expensive for us–in fact, it's probably been cheaper. Labor costs have gone up, but I'd rather pay another man than the chemical companies. We were running one extra tractor cultivating this year, because we had almost 500 acres of corn and 700 acres of beans that we were cultivating at the same time."

Figuring out a better way is not easy. As I write this article in June, a fungus called grey leaf spot is beginning to show up in my cherry tomatoes. Last year, it slowly and inexorably killed them, though I still made a profit. I don't want to spray with fungicides, and I won't. There is a temptation to spray, with the hope of maximum profits, and pride in a nicelooking tomato patch, but the temptation is muted by the fact that if I were going to spray, I should have started weeks ago.

Instead of concentrating on this article, my mind spins, common and frustrating paths of thought for organic growers. Is there an imbalance in my soil that contributes to this? Will the improvements I made over last year–planting on higher, better-drained ground, more regular seaweed sprays–make a difference? Will the better weather help the plants to grow ahead of the disease? Is there a more resistant variety I could plant? Is there a natural control I could use? I don't know the answers. Last year the extension service could give no help other than to suggest chemical fungicides and resistant varieties, none of which were cherry tomatoes.

Certainly the agricultural establishment has treated organic farming with indifference, even hostility. Though USDA's 1980 study was generally sympathetic, last year the administration fired the one employee (of some *85,000*) who coordinated organic farming activities. Less than one million dollars of USDA's $430 million research budget goes to research even closely related. "Organic farming is a dead end," declared Secretary of Agriculture John Block.

For agribusiness's corporations, there's little money to be made in crop rotations and healthy plants that can fight off diseases on their own. Land grant colleges instead do research on tobacco harvesting machines or maximizing soybean yields. Distrust and scepticism of any official efforts to research organic farming run high among alienated growers. "Yes, they tried that a few years ago," says A.P. Thomson. "They take a piece of land and throw some raw manure on it and don't pay attention to compost and soil balance and then take pictures of the bugs and the sick plants and show the plot next to it they used all the chemicals on, and use it to show organic doesn't work."

But there are some signs of changing attitudes and greater responsiveness. In 1982, Oregon Representative Jim Weaver and Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy introduced an Organic Farming Bill in Congress. The act would have set up six pilot research projects at land grant universities, and a system of volunteer organic farmer "experts" to assist other farmers in transition; it would also have ordered the extension service to distribute organic farming information. The bill received strong support within Congress and from the public but was opposed by USDA. It was defeated by a narrow margin in the House and never taken up in the Senate.

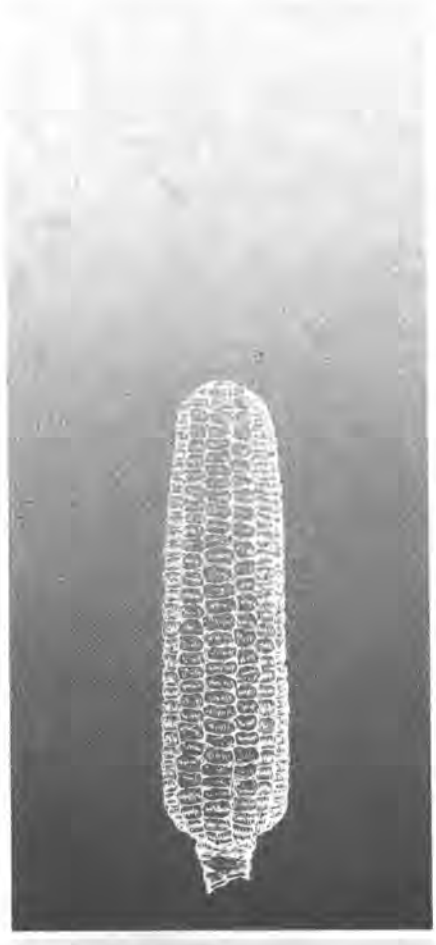


*photo by Burr Beard*

CAL HUGE

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Jesse Helms of North Carolina did not actively oppose last year's bill, but neither did he actively support it. Lobbyists pushing the bill were hopeful that he would come around, but he recently said of a new version introduced in 1983 that it "creates authorities which are duplicative, imposes overly restrictive requirements on the conduct of research, and its costs are excessive." In fact, the bill calls for expenditures of only $2.2 million annually – measured against an agricultural research budget of close to half a billion dollars.

But there are some positive signs of increasing communication and cooperation between the organic community and the research and extension system. Integrated pest management programs to reduce pesticide use are being developed and introduced by the extension service. Graduate students are doing sympathetic research, and individual extension agents are assisting organic grower associations. North Carolina State University offers a course in alternative agricultural systems, and professors in the Soil Sciences Department, with a grant from USDA, are doing an evaluation of research and literature dealing with alternative farming systems.

Marketing is one of the big problem areas for organic farmers. The long-established growers like A.P. and Lee McComb ship their fruit all over the country to a clientele of individuals and mail-order customers established over many years. But bulk marketing is more important today, as distributors of natural foods report a burgeoning business. Consumer awareness is clearly on the rise even in the South, where Southern Fried still holds the overwhelming edge over a natural foods consciousness.

Who would not prefer an unsprayed apple, a stalk of broccoli or a tomato free of pesticide residues? Some consumers, it seems. Selling at farmers' markets, I've had people enthusiastically patronize my stand for its organic produce while others turned blankly away as if the concept were foreign to their understanding, or they didn't want to think about choices, or they expected my sweet potatoes

and beans to be too expensive or full of bugs. My "organically grown" sign is sometimes an attraction, sometimes a liability.

Lex Alexander, who runs Wellspring Grocery in Durham, North Carolina, carries high-quality produce both organic and conventional. "The organic produce we get from local growers is often prettier and better cared for, and people go for that," he says. "But if there is a rack of commercial squash at 59 cents a pound and one of organic at 79 cents, customers buy the commercial. I think it will take some time. There's a small group of people who care, and an even smaller group of people who are willing to pay the price."

The higher price is often because Wellspring buys much of its organic produce from California, paying up to four dollars a bushel in shipping charges. Says Alexander, "There are not that many growers in this area we can support. When we first opened, it seemed like we had a lot of people growing for us, but then maybe they weren't making enough money. But we sell a lot of produce and could easily support two or three growers, and I hope our presence here can help some growers get established."

Earl Lawrence in Rocky Mount, Virginia, is one organic farmer who found it difficult to make a living at it. For 10 years he operated a fully diversified 400-acre organic farm. Located far from the urban centers of organic demand, he used a combination of marketing methods: produce to local farmers' markets and a food co-op in Roanoke, grains and beans to Mountain Warehouse, a co-op natural food distributor, beef and vegetables directly to individuals. "It's not being organic that doesn't pay – it's *farming*. If anything, being organic helped, because it kept my costs down. I don't really have any trouble growing the stuff organically, but no farmer is getting anything near parity for his crops."

The specialty market for organic crops offers some premium in price for growers, but it is still an undeveloped, inefficient marketing network. Perhaps most of the organically grown crops are marketed through conventional channels: grains and soybeans to the local elevator, produce at the state farmers' markets, to supermarket chains, or directly to consumers without special fanfare. Lee McComb will sell most of his grapefruit to the MinuteMaid plant for grapefruit juice. And my own cherry tomatoes will appear on the salad bar of my local Western Sizzling Steakhouse alongside the chemical-laden iceberg lettuce from California.

By far the most positive development for organic farming in the South has been the formation of grower organizations. In almost every state of the South, membership associations have sprouted up during the last five years. Several of these organizations have memberships in the hundreds. All publish newsletters and have conferences or meetings which feature speakers, workshops, and information exchange. The Virginia Association of Biological Farmers, started five years ago by A.P. Thomson and seven other farmers, now has a membership of over 350 farmers, gardeners, and consumers. In Tennessee, there is the Alternative Growers Association; in Kentucky, the New Farm Coalition; in Mississippi and Georgia, there are small Organic Growers Associations. I work as part-time staff-person for the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA), which includes growers in both North and South Carolina.

From the very beginning of CFSA, it was clear how urgently organic growers needed information and support from each other; they certainly weren't getting much of either anywhere else. People were desperately eager to find out each other's methods, to talk about their own, to find that there were other growers as crazy, or as sane, as themselves. Said one North Carolina woman, after attending the first meeting of her local CFSA group, "Now I no longer feel like the only petunia in the onion patch."

CFSA publishes membership and marketing directories and is working on a program of organic certification to benefit growers who wish to certify and market their crops under a clearly defined standard of organic production. Members can buy natural farm supplies through cooperative bulk orders and can exchange heirloom seeds. CFSA speakers and displays present the organization message at fairs and meetings. We've presented testimony in support of the Organic Farming Act and encouraged letter-writing on this, on federal pesticide laws, and various other issues.

At issue for all these groups is the future development of their constituencies. All include gardeners and consumers as well as farmers, but they vary in the "purism" of their approach and in their concentration on organic agriculture. The Kentucky New Farm Coalition is more a political group, focused less on farming methods than on alternative farm policies. "It's mostly homesteaders and urban people concerned about protecting the land," says Hal Hamilton. "We've always resisted definition as an organic

photo by Burr Beard

TIM McALLER

group." Dennis Gregg, who helped start the Tennessee Alternative Growers Association, says it is made up of "purists with open minds . . . people who believe and are practicing organic growing at various scales as purely as they can."

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association began life in 1979 as Carolina Organic Growers, but changed its name after less than a year to reflect the group's wider concerns and attract a broader base membership. Says the group's president, Cindy Crossen, "I'm pleased at the efforts we have made to reach out to transitional growers and not just be an elitist group of organic growers – I think we made the right choice."

CFSA has a diverse membership. Besides the young alternative types, the group includes both Lee McComb and Cal Huge, as well as some completely conventional tobacco, peach, beef, and row-crop farmers. Common concerns tie us together – farm stewardship and sustainable agriculture, the practice of methods that will allow the land to be farmed forever – but sometimes the differences are more apparent.

The conventional farmer exploring alternative methods may feel out of place coming to a CFSA conference for the first time – meeting a lot of young urban gardeners or vegetable growers, and eating the natural foods meals. But he or she is very much what the organization needs. For all these organizations to have any influence on agricultural policy or methods, they must continue to build their membership to include consumers and conventional farmers.

The way Frank Stancil sees it, "There's three kinds of farmers. You've got the chemical farmer at one end, the organic farmer at the other, and the "ecofarmer" in between. If I can be an ecofarmer in three or four years, I'll be relatively satisfied."

Says A.P. Thomson, "My God, if a fellow doesn't use herbicides in his orchard and uses the other chemicals, his apples are already far better than the rest of them. People have financial obligations, they have trouble understanding the vocabulary and the total philosophy . . . we need to get these people in, and then show them. We're so far down the tube in this country with the depletion of our soils, the chemicals that we use, that anything will help."□

*Debby Wechsler, besides being a farmer and staff-person for the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, is a free-lance writer and graphic designer. She lives on her farm in Randolph County, North Carolina.*

*photo by Larry Russell*

**DEBBY WECHSLER**

# Comparison Farming

Because most academic agricultural scientists hold long-standing beliefs that organic farming systems are not suitable for widespread use in America – and especially not in the South – research has tended to underestimate organic agriculture, or discount it entirely. But the situation is changing, largely because farmers are growing organically, research or no, and the scientists are beginning to take notice. The newer studies and surveys reveal that organic systems offer some long-term advantages over chemical-intensive, conventional farming. Work reviewed in the 1980 USDA study mentioned above – *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming* – indicates, for example:

- Crop production is about equally profitable on organic and conventional farms, except that organic farms are more diversified and more flexible to manage.
- Yields of most organically raised crops ranged from the same to about 10 percent lower than on the conventional farms.
- Although it is more labor-intensive, organic farming requires less fossil energy to produce a crop unit than conventional farming. Thus organic farms would be less severely affected than conventional farms by a deteriorating energy situation.
- Soil erosion is significantly reduced by the crop-rotation, leguminous cover cropping, and tillage practices used on organic farms.
- Insect pests, weeds, and diseases are often adequately controlled by cultivating practices, such as crop rotation, mechanical cultivation, intercropping, and use of biological control agents.

# Pioneers on the Citrus Frontier

BY CHERYL HIERS

The oranges are tree-ripened. They haven't been primed by chemical fertilizers or protected by pesticides. Without dye to brighten them or wax to polish them, they don't look like "TV oranges." Because of their mottled appearance, the Florida Citrus Commission says they aren't U.S. No. 1 Grade and can't be sold in supermarkets. But to the chemically sensitive, these oranges are essential. To those who have tasted them, they're delicious. To those who grow them, they are the tangible product of a philosophy that has at its heart a concern for the land and people.

Lee and Virginia McComb are among the pioneers of organic citrus. They haven't revolutionized the citrus industry, but they are proud of their work. Owners of 65 acres of orange and grapefruit groves around Leesburg, Florida, they have survived three decades as growers, built up a compost-manufacturing plant, won a few battles with the Citrus Commission, and welcomed their son David into the business. Their experiment seems to be working.

"Growing food is just a means to an end – people are the end," Lee McComb says. At 76, he is a tall, tanned man who is eager to discuss why he is committed to ecologically sensitive farming. "If you have a concern for people – for their health," he says, "you're going to *have* to have a concern for everything all the way up the line, from the soil up." In agricultural terms, Lee's concern translates into a program that involves applying compost and natural controls to his groves. He is quick to say he has nothing against chemicals in themselves: "The problem is that chemical fertilizers are so highly concentrated with so few elements – usually only nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium – that they upset the balance of the soil. Over the years they deplete the natural nutrients in the ground."

His experience as an assistant production manager of a large Pennsylvania farm convinced him that chemical fertilizers gradually destroy the very soil they are "enriching." "I saw we were making sick soil that made sick plants that attracted insects and disease," he says. "If we were doing that to the plants, what were we doing to the people and animals that ate those plants? I figured there had to be a better way to farm."

Looking for a better way, Lee and Virginia left Pennsylvania and moved to Florida in 1945 to start a composting business. Although they were received with less than wild enthusiasm by the local Leesburg farmers – especially since at the time there were no machines designed for spreading compost – the McCombs stuck with their business.

By the early '50s, Lee says, "I had bought a 10-acre orange grove and I was ready to try my compost and my methods on my own land. Trouble was the grove I bought was dying. An average grove in Florida is on the way out by the time it's 25 to 30 years old. If the soil wasn't leached of its nutrients year after year, the trees could last four times longer. Anyway, I started my program on this dying grove: no pesticides, no chemical fertilizers, no clean cultivation."

Thirty years later, Lee walks the dirt road beside that same grove, proudly showing me the tall, healthy trees. "They're still producing," he says, pointing to the green fruit shining in the July sun. According to his 31-year-old son David, the groves not only produce, they produce *well*. On the average, the McCombs harvest 400 boxes per acre – at the upper end of the state average of 350 to 400 boxes per acre.

As a second-generation citrus grower, David echoes the concerns of his father. "We concentrate on growing from the soil up," he says. "I call it 'inoculating the soil.' The fact that my soil's alive gives the trees more potential to pick up nutrients and ward off disease. I'd rather have the soil good so I won't have to spray the leaves."

In growing their citrus, the McCombs try to understand and work with the natural environment. Virginia, a pleasant, white-haired woman who gives an impression of quiet competence, explains how terrain may determine if orange trees suffer damage in a winter freeze. "If there's a hill in the grove," she says, "cold air will move down into a pocket and the trees higher up will be saved. That's called 'air drainage' and you need to look for that when you're buying a grove." Lakes, also, according to Virginia, are natural protection against freezes since cold air is warmed as it passes over water.

When Lee takes me on a tour of his groves, I see how even weeds are

photos by Cheryl Hiers

DAVID AND LEE McCOMB

granted a place in the McCombs's respect for nature. An exotic tangle of undergrowth shoots up high and thick around the orange trees. It seems a tempting haven for rattlesnakes and I wonder aloud how the pickers feel about venturing into such a thicket. Lee assures me that the weeds are plowed under in the fall before the harvest; he doesn't plow regularly like most growers, who, says Lee, "are afraid of weeds." He believes the weeds act as a living mulch, keeping moisture and nutrients in the ground. The citrus trees themselves are thriving, full of fruit.

A range of problems – from the humorous to the serious – has come up over the years. Lee smiles as he recounts how he once decided to go into the snail business. A natural friend of orange trees, snails work like tiny vacuum cleaners moving slowly over the leaves cleaning them. Lee invested $600 in enough snails to start colonies on his trees. Visions of a snail empire were crushed, however, when raccoons raided the sacks he kept the snails in during cold spells.

What about other problems? "I haven't had problems, I've had challenges," says Lee. "One of the challenges has been the Florida Citrus Commission. They didn't take us seriously at first. They thought it was a joke and that we would fold in a year or two." When the McCombs persisted in growing fruit without chemicals or sprays, the commission prohibited fruit from being shipped out of Florida that wasn't U.S. No. 1 Grade.

"That means how *pretty* it looks, not how good it is," according to Lee. The regulation prevented the McCombs from selling their citrus anywhere but juice plants and roadside stands. Eventually, after a vigorous letter-writing campaign waged by the McCombs and their customers, the commission modified the rule to allow "organic citrus" to be shipped out-of-state. The McCombs are now limited mainly to what is called the "gift-fruit" market – mail-order home deliveries – and to wholesalers who supply health food stores and cooperatives.

Without the U.S. No. 1 Grade, the McComb fruit is excluded from one of the largest parts of the commercial market – the chain grocery stores. Lee speaks long and passionately about the need to open up that market for organically grown food. "We have got to give up the idea of basing food grade on cosmetics," he says. "We shouldn't buy food for prettiness, but for nutrition and taste. We need to re-educate the public." Active members of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the McCombs are part of a network of Southern farmers who

**LEE AND VIRGINIA McCOMB** are working together to promote the methods and markets for "healthful, sustainable agriculture."

While David firmly supports his father's approach to farming, he is skeptical about trying to re-educate the public on food issues. "It's their business what they eat," he says. "They have to make their own decisions." He speculates that 20 or 30 years from now, people will have made the connection between how food is grown and the health effects – either because of scientific evidence or because they have figured it out for themselves. Until then, David believes there is no reason not to try to produce what people want – "as long as you don't sacrifice the integrity of the fruit."

The criteria by which the McCombs measure the "integrity" of their oranges and grapefruit is by no means absolute and complete. Put simply, they want to produce "the best food" they can. A test analysis Lee has commissioned indicates that his citrus contains significantly less acid and more vitamin C and minerals than the same variety of oranges grown on chemical fertilizers. For chemically sensitive people who cannot eat most commercial citrus, the McCombs' fruit fulfills a vital requirement. "I think we produce as nutritious a piece of fruit as we can," David says, "but I think we can do better."

The future poses many agricultural and economic challenges for the McCombs. Not only are they still excluded from chain grocery stores, but another of the largest markets for citrus – the frozen juice companies – is really just a last resort for the McCombs. "Our goal is to get the most nutritious fruit into the individual stomach and *not* the juice can," David says. When it is mixed with chemically grown oranges and boiled down into concentrate, the value of organic citrus is largely lost. To offset these commercial limitations, David hopes to expand their groves to include popular varieties like navels and red grapefruit. "Basically," he says, "this business means keeping your heart right, but being logical with your pocketbook."

Through all their years of planning and work, the McComb family has shown a remarkable knack for combining good intentions with practical results. Their success is encouragement for all those who would like to see a flourishing agriculture that has at its core a concern for the land and people. □

*Cheryl Hiers is a writer who lives in Ormond Beach, Florida.*

# FUTURE FOOD?

BY DIANA MARA HENRY PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN BORNS

A vision of the future, captured live under glass, was how Walt Disney saw his Experimental Community of Tomorrow. The Experimental Community – Epcot – has been a reality in Orlando, Florida, since October, 1982. Six theme pavilions and six corporate sponsors use the technology and public relations of Disney World to sell us the twenty-first century the way they'd like to see it.

Dart & Kraft, Inc. – makers of Kraft foods – is the sponsor of "The Land" pavilion, Disney's look at the future of agriculture, ecology, and nutrition. (The other pavilions are: "Energy," sponsored by Exxon; "Imagination," brought to you by Kodak; "Motion," by General Motors; "Spaceship Earth," by the Bell System; and "Computer Central," courtesy of Sperry.)

Disney designs and crafts the shows at Epcot for its corporate clients, and it has awarded Kraft one of the best: "Listen to the Land," a boat ride of the kind first popularized at Disneyland in California. While you wait in line for your cruise, you can keep cool with a large Sealtest ice cream, made by Kraft, the exclusive ice cream of Disney World.

Once on board the boat, you're drawn into the proper atmosphere by a passage through a dark tunnel and by the guide's hypnotic invitation ("We are going to travel across the land, through time, into the center of something most of us have forgotten about"). Next you slide under huge multi-colored luminous plastic constructions representing the anatomical parts of plants – a "Symphony of the Seed" that makes plants seem incomprehensible and fearsome.

Dioramas depicting the dramatic environments of rain forests, deserts, and great prairies introduce you to the inhospitability and wildness of nature. This introduction is key to understanding the exhibit; according to the display coordinator, Carl Hodges, "More important than the hundreds of thousands of plants that nature has given us to work with is man's ingenuity." You can see now that the story of "The Land" is the story of the taming of nature by man.

The need for control is given lurid emphasis as the boat swings into the prairie biome: fires rage on the horizon, lightning blitzes, and locust swarms fill the sky. "Despite all these problems, the settlers persevered,"

## THE DISNEY VISION, BROUGHT TO YOU BY KRAFT

says your guide, "and in time the prairies became family farms flourishing with crops."

Now the boat swings into a farmhouse scene, with a few animated chickens scratching at the dirt, a goat pulling on a tether, and no people. "As we enter the old red barn," crows your guide, "let's look at some of the changes and advancements we've made in this, the last century of American agriculture. There are still many family farms in America, but each year small farms are being replaced by large-scale agriculture, and growing food becomes more a science than a way of life."

Having presented the loss of small and family farms so positively, the ride now snakes through a darkened tunnel where visual media reinforce the message. Sepia photographs show nineteenth century food production, followed by black and white films of the early twentieth century, and finally, giant 70-millimeter color films of modern-day agriculture.

The new full-color agriculture scenes follow swiftly one upon the other: vast monocultures with giant machinery ripping up tomato plants, even more enormous machinery shaking pecan trees, men in white coats holding up test tubes in a lab. "We now have better machines, better seed, better fertilizer, and better pest management," says your guide. "We have better research resulting in more food per acre. We've cruised from the past right into the present, and seen a lot of changes."

The medium of the boat ride really is the message here: transitions of super-human scope are easy, and all you need to do is sit back and let them (the men in the white coats and the giant machines) do it.

Listen to your guide. "What about tomorrow? . . .Well, folks, as you can see, we've been working on it. The plants you are about to see are real and alive. They've been grown summer and winter in sophisticated greenhouses. It's what we call controlled environment agriculture, or CEA. Now we don't think CEA will ever replace traditional agriculture, but we're hoping it will increase productivity in many of the harsh areas of the world. Please keep your arms and hands inside and refrain from handling the plants."

Tropic Farm is the first growing area of this "sophisticated greenhouse" which is called "Future Farm," where rice, pineapples, soybeans, and sugar cane grow. Here, awaiting the "better seed" and "better research" of modern agriculture are two of the "miracle plants" to feed the future hungry generations: amaranth and the winged bean.

Amaranth is the grain that supported Aztec civilization, newly rediscovered – a high-protein grain rich in amino acids complementary to those in wheat and other grains we now grow. It will flourish in drought-like conditions and needs little, if any, fertilization and no herbicides.

The winged bean, originating in Asia, contains up to 37 percent protein. Best of all, "all parts of the winged bean are tasty and edible," according to a Kraft press handout. "The fleshy pods make a chewy, slightly sweet vegetable that resembles green beans. The leaves taste like spinach, and the flower, when cooked, is similar to a mushroom. The firm-fleshed tuberous roots, with 10 times the amount of protein found in a potato, have a delicious nutty flavor."

Exotic, esoteric, and dazzling examples of technology grown at the

end of the boat cruise are hydroponics of all kinds, space drums for growing lettuce in orbit, and halophytes, plants that grow in salt water. These are touted as possible food sources for coastal areas of the world. Though it's not mentioned, they also may be necessary for the vast areas in this country which are being turned into, or have already become, salt deserts as a result of spray irrigation.

As you did while waiting in line to begin the boat ride, you'll also think about eating when you come out, because the end is close to the many fast-food stalls of the "Farmer's Market." There's not a farmer in sight.

IN the film, "Symbiosis," another attraction at "The Land," Kraft addresses environmental themes; no titles intrude on the screen to remind you that you are seeing fiction. The music throbs and swells, majestic landscapes spread across 60 feet of screen at 25 percent faster than normal speed to enhance brightness and color.

"We have always intervened in nature," the message begins. You see the good side of this intervention: rice terraces of 3,000 years ago side by side with ultramodern rice seed banks in the Philippines . . . "monuments to our enthusiasm for changing the environment." Then you see the bad side: "We misused our farmlands . . . our forests . . . and our lakes, rivers, and streams . . . began to die." Quickly upbeat: you see the rivers gushing (clean?), the hillsides laid waste by clearcutting chainsaws and chemical fires (and then replanted with tiny seedlings), and the dustbowl irrigated and green again.

Any day's headlines can answer the questions posed in the finale: "How many more times will a chemical or pesticide, mistakenly assumed harmless, surprise us by turning up in the food chain? . . . How much longer will more than one-quarter of the world's food supply rot on the ground or be ruined by pests simply because of a lack of proper storage and delivery systems? How much more of the world's precious arable land will be made useless by poor planning or uncontrolled development? And how much more of the world's rain will fall bearing pollutants that poison our lakes, rivers, and streams?"

This film by Paul Gerber probably speaks the language of the public better than any other attraction at "The Land," and it contains the most open references to current problems that you'll find at Epcot.

What's not mentioned in the film, despite its hard-hitting language, are the by-products of the technologies touted as solutions. It is not mentioned that no-till farming, said to be healing the dustbowl, is done with herbicides, that the technology of irrigation that is shown – overhead irrigation – is turning the plains into a salty desert, or that every time a forest is clear-cut or destroyed with fire we replace a hundred varieties of trees with one, and one tree with three that are less than a hundredth its size.

Despite the rousing conclusion ("It is within our power . . . what is needed is the will") only industry, government, and science are shown solving problems. There is not a single example of individuals adopting conservation measures – recycling, composting, mulching gardens – to save resources and avoid sullying air and water.


"KITCHEN Kabaret" comes next. A sequined curtain spells Kraft across the stage, as this animated 12-minute kiddie commercial – it's called a "nutrition show" – begins. First the Kitchen Krackpots rise to play a lively Dixieland number. They are Salsa Jar, Mustard Squeeze Bottle, Mayonnaise Jar, Parmesan Cheese Can, and Bar-B-Que Sauce Bottle. All are Kraft packages in every detail of shape, color, and label except the name. As Mary Agnes Walsh, Kraft's chief spokesperson, told me, "We wouldn't want them to look like someone else's product!"

The show continues with the four food groups: dairy, bread and cereals, meat, fruit and vegetables, all processed, packaged, cooked, or cut. Mr. Dairy Goods opens the refrigerator to reveal his "girls," the "Stars of the Milky Way": Miss Cheese, who speaks like Mae West; Miss Yogurt, who sports a French accent and says she's very cultured; and Miss Ice Cream. The Cereal Sisters are in their packages and on the shelf: Maizy Oats, Rennie Rice, and Connie Corn sing to the tunes of Boogie Woogie Bak'ry Boy, a loaf of bread who is transformed into a piece of toast. The meat group, represented by Hamm 'N' Eggz, "will help keep you strong."

So far nothing in the show has contained information which could change the idea of kids who think their food comes from the supermarket. The dairy goods have appeared from a refrigerator (not from a cow, goat, or ewe), the ham and eggs from the stove, the spices from jars. Now Hamm 'N' Eggz deliver a rhymed joke, illustrated a cartoon, that should scare the curiosity out of any kids wondering about raising their own food.

*"A hungry fox boldly walking through a hen house door. Too bad for him, he met a chicken who was six-foot-four. He won't forget the lickin' he got from that big chicken. Now he gets his poultry at the store."*

This is the attraction through which Kraft hopes to speak most directly to children (whom Kraft literature describes as "Tomorrow's Market To-

day"). In official company words, "Helping these young people achieve good nutrition and balanced meals along with proper shopping skills now and for the future is one of the underlying goals of Kraft's education program."

"It was an insult to our intelligence, as far as Kraft was concerned," said one 50-year-old couple who traveled from Memphis for the opening and asked for their money back from Epcot and got it. "Epcot was misrepresented in that it was just a glorified shopping center. It didn't hold anything to attract my attention, nor did I think it was educational. From all that I had read and all that I had heard about it, I thought I was going to go and see a city of tomorrow, and there's no such thing."

People knowledgeable about food, nutrition, and agriculture have more to say. Joan Gussow, chair of the nutrition education department at Columbia University's Teachers College and editor of *The Feeding Web: Issues in Nutritional Ecology*, comments: "The epitome of Disney World is sitting and being conveyed through a world in which you have no involvement, you don't touch anything, you don't feel anything, you don't handle anything, and you don't have to do any work. And that's the future, which is just appalling as a series of lessons for people. In other words, the whole message is concentrated power, concentrated control. What's being set up here is the notion that the only way to deal with nature is to keep it absolutely under control."

When we went backstage after the boat ride to tour the support greenhouses with Lexie Herman McEntley, staff agronomist, we asked why the winged bean, which had been given such glowing accolades during the boat ride, isn't already feeding the hungry millions.

"Because it's not commercially feasible," she said. "It's great, for small-scale it's perfect. But the people that are trying to change the agriculture situation are not as concerned with small-scale agriculture as they are with large-scale. The companies who would be interested in doing research on this are looking for a once-over [machine], not a hand harvest.

"The two obstacles are that the winged bean never matures all at once – it's harvestable for months at a time – and also it's a climber. Once these two obstacles are overcome, they will try to incorporate them into these countries. That's the only way we are going to feed the population as it grows," she explained.

The winged bean, then, will be introduced into needy countries once it has been scientifically researched and bred to meet the needs of "international agriculture" (the term used at "The Land" to mean transnational agribusiness). Only when the plant has been bred to a bush form, ripening its fruits all at once so they can be stripped by machine, and the seed of this variety patented, will a company such as Kraft begin growing it for the Third World.

Despite its commercial drawbacks, the winged bean could in its present form grow up around any building in the tropics. It could feed a household for many months with seeds to spare for replanting.

Charles "Skip" Kaufman, Director of New Crops Development at the Rodale experimental farm in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, supplied amaranth seeds and information to "The Land." He says that in his experience subsistence farmers at least subsist, even without cash, by growing their own food. "The little bit of traveling I've done to collect amaranth, it seems to me that the people who do well are the ones who know how to grow something in their backyard and take care of themselves. You do see people who are doing fairly well for themselves with their backyard gardens." No example of this is given in the Tropic Farm section,

nor anywhere else at "The Land."

Susan Kellam, editor of the *Cornucopia Project Newsletter*, believes that "increasingly we're tending towards allowing fewer and fewer people to control the food we eat. . . . Growing all this food indoors without soil is really just putting it in the hands of corporations."

This is the trap which Robert Rodale believes is being set: "The way agribusiness is going, food will get very expensive and the public won't have any alternative. They will in fact be trapped in the present system."

As a technical hint to home gardeners, some intercropping is shown at Epcot. Use of vertical space is also demonstrated by A-frames on which grow louffa gourds, eggplants, and soybeans. But instead of compost or earthworm-enriched soil, which most gardeners would have to work with at home, "Listen to the Land" boat

riders see plants growing in sterile white sand, nutrients supplied by drip irrigation tubing at their roots.

What does a corporation such as Kraft find glamorous about hydroponics, we asked. Control is the answer. "Bad weather and labor situations could cause problems," said John Wilson, Kraft vice president of marketing, speaking of traditional field farming in *Advertising Age* in 1979.

In 1982, C. C. Grinnell, director of new products development for Kraft's corporate marketing development group, was more explicit: "If the lettuce crop fails in California, we suffer in pourable dressings." The labor consideration was outlined by Wally Tokarz in *Advertising Age*: "Regardless of who the indoor farmer is, what vegetables he grows, or where he is located, one thing is certain: he has to worry less about a labor walkout such as the one by the United Farm Workers that hit the Imperial Valley in California this year."

THERE is some controversy over the nutritional value of hydroponic produce, but the 3,000 people who go through the "The Land" environment each hour would never know it. Kraft's Grinnell believes people are not concerned with how a plant is grown. "They want the end benefit; a superior product is a superior product and that's the important thing, not how it's grown. Spinach is spinach is spinach, and as long as it gets the nutrients, it doesn't matter what the medium is that transmits the nutrients. You don't nutritionally label growing things." Is fresh produce, then, the last bastion where no labeling laws or nutritional regulation can touch the food industry?

"A lot of the seeds grown hydroponically have been processed, the genetic codes spliced together and spliced together so many times . . . often a lot of the nutrition has been lost. The overbreeding of seeds has bred out a lot of the nutrition," says Susan Kellam.

Eventually most discussions we had with the Disney people ended up at the Disney *sine qua non* of entertainment.

"We are an interesting hybrid between show and science," says Henry "Hank" Robitaille, who is responsible for planning, design, and day-to-day maintenance for the growing systems. "We have to be a good show. If you took people through the average greenhouse, with 50 percent of the leaf area on tomatoes destroyed by leaf miner insects, for example, they wouldn't be impressed. I think that to teach them and show them what we want to show them, we have to impress them."

James Turner, a former Nader food advocate who is now a member of Kraft's Nutrition Advisory Council for "The Land," believes "there's hope for alternative concepts and techniques to be shown as the exhibits evolve. . . . I want them to open up discussion with all the various people who are interested in 'The Land' as a concept, who are not part of the establishment.

"The whole country is moving towards better food alternatives," adds Turner, saying that although the public's interest in good food has outstripped Kraft's ability to produce it, Kraft is definitely "being drawn by that interest."

Disney World too, he believes, is being drawn by a changing public. "Understand that 10 years ago the primary focus of a corporation like Disney was to take people to Disney World or Disneyland and rip off $125 per person and have their brains scrambled by silliness. . . . Epcot, the way it's gone, is an order or two of magnitude away from mindlessness, and it's really capturing the imagination of the public."

Turner, author of the book, *The Chemical Feast*, is now a partner in the Washington, D.C., law firm of Swankin & Turner. He gives as a comparison the story of his battle to put "good food" into supermarkets. "When I started out with Nader, we did a survey of supermarket people. I said, 'Why don't you sell good food?' and they said, 'What do you mean, sell good food? We're not in the food business, we're in the real estate business. If it sells, we'll put it on our shelves.' I took that as a hopeful sign. . . . It meant that they were not opposed to selling good food, so that if we could prove to them that consumers would buy good food, they'd sell it."

Turner summarizes: "If you think about 'The Land' pavilion as an improvement on Disney World, I think it's a step in the right direction. If you think of it as providing the answers to the agricultural problems, that's just not here." □

*Freelancer Diana Mara Henry writes and photographs in New York City and gardens in Ulster County, New York.*

*A somewhat different version of this article appeared in* **Food Monitor** *magazine in March/April, 1983. It is used by permission.*

# The Good Life on a 25-Acre Farm

*Unlike many of the nation's experts, Booker T. Whatley believes in the future of the small farm as a profitable enterprise. To demonstrate his commitment, he has put his 30 years of professional horticultural experience and training into the development of a plan he is confident will bring the small farm back to life, a plan based on a working model set up at Tuskegee Institute in 1974.*

*"There's too much talk, in my opinion, around this country about the demise of the small farmer," Whatley says. "The new dean of agriculture over at Auburn said that small farming was just going to become a hobby. Nobody from the land grant system opened their mouths. Now, I wrote that guy a letter. I haven't heard from him. The land grant system hasn't addressed the problems of the small farmer. They weren't even doing research that related to small farmers."*

*The land grant system that Whatley refers to was established in 1862 when the United States Congress granted public land and funds to each state to underwrite agricultural and technical colleges as a resource to the farmers of the nation. Additional land and monies were set aside in 1890 for separate facilities for Afro-Americans in the Southern states. The original sytem was expanded in 1887 to include state experimental stations and further in 1914 when county extension offices were set up to make information, resources, and expertise more accessible to the rural population.*

*This land grant system which once held such promise for farmers has failed to address the needs and prob-*

AN INTERVIEW WITH BOOKER T. WHATLEY BY KRISTA BREWER

*lems of small farmers, more and more of whom face bankruptcy as farming incomes decrease. As Whatley points out, there has been little or no research devoted to finding ways to make the small farm economically viable; 95 percent of the system's research budget is devoted to corporate farming and its methods. Booker T. Whatley wants to change all that.*

*Whatley grew up on his family's farm in Anniston, Alabama, and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in agriculture at Alabama A&M and a doctorate in horticulture at Rutgers. In his long career he has developed five new varieties of sweet potatoes and 15 of muscadine grapes. He has also run a hydroponic farm in Japan and done research on biomass fuel production. After many years of teaching and research at Southern University in Louisiana, Whatley came to Tuskegee in 1973 and retired there a couple of years ago.*

*In this interview Whatley talks about the elements of his plan, how it operates, and why he thinks it holds the promise of a decent income for the small farmer.*

The plan we are presently advocating grew out of our sweet potato, small fruits, and honeybee research programs at Tuskegee Institute. Now, the first article that I published about this plan was in 1974 when we also set up the 25-acre farm. One of the problems with agriculture, especially as it pertains to small farmers, is that we professionals down through the years have advocated that the small farmer produce exactly the same things that the big farmers do. If you have one farmer growing 1,000 acres and another one with 40 acres, our whole concept was to scale down the small guy and let him grow 10 acres of cotton and 10 acres of soybeans and maybe 10 acres of corn and have a pasture with some beef cattle, and that's the same thing the big guy is doing.

Now it became crystal clear to me that small farmers cannot play in the same ballpark with the big farmers. So we're talking about growing blueberries, muscadines, strawberries, sweet potatoes. And we're not talking about growing them to ship up to New York or Chicago. We're talking about, if it's 25 miles to Montgomery, selling it right here in Montgomery.

A problem that even big farmers have is cash flow. In other words, if you're a big cotton farmer, your cash comes in from September through December. The same holds true with soybeans, peanuts, and all the major agricultural crops. So we devised a plan that took the small farmer out of competition with the big farmer and also provided year-round income. And we did this on 25 acres.

The reason we settled on 25 acres is because everybody in this country would call a 25-acre farm a small farm – except the USDA, that is, because their definition of a small farm is a farm that grosses $20,000 or less a year. In other words, it could be a 1,000-acre farm and they would still classify it as a small farm if its gross sales were $20,000 or less.

*Before a rash of publicity came Whatley's way, beginning with a local newspaper article in 1980, and eventually including network television coverage and a lengthy interview in* Mother Earth News, *Whatley had "just talked about it in scientific circles." His plan was little known except at Tuskegee and among other professional horticulturalists and agriculturalists.*

But see, that's the worst place in the world to talk about it because when you go to a horticulture meeting, you ain't talking to nobody but horticulturists and they're not going to set up no farm! So, we kind of rocked along and were revising the thing and getting it more sophisticated until late 1980, when a staff reporter at the *Birmingham News* wrote an article that was picked up by the major newspapers in this country and the title of the article was "A $100,000 Plan on 25 Acres for Small Farmers."

One reason I think the article was so appealing to people nationally was that 1980 was a bad crop year across the country. The article came out on the second of November. Between the third of November and the twelfth of November I received over 1,000 letters and about 1,500 phone calls! Now a good 85 percent of those letters and phone calls were from right here in Alabama, but the rest were from all across the country.

The plan appeals to a lot of folks. It turns out that the American public, say city people, when they think about going out and setting up a farm, they think about 25 acres. And I didn't know that. We got all kinds of letters from people saying, "I bought 23 acres," or "I bought 27 acres," so the plan just fits right into people's thinking.

The plan is built on several principles. One is that it provides year-round weekly income – that's to solve the cash-flow problem. And that means having the right crops. Here, and all across the South, the first crop we can harvest in the spring is strawberries and they come in in the middle of May and you harvest them for a month. Then in the middle of June the blueberries come in. We got five acres of sweet potatoes and we harvest one of those acres the end of July, and then in August and September we harvest the grapes. You can sell the sweet potatoes on a weekly basis from the first of November to the first of May. Then we got collard greens in there to fill in any gaps. And we got Southern peas and we got honey bees. So that rounds this thing out where you got good cash flow. We also recommend that if a suitable pond site can be found on the farm that you construct an irrigation pond and stock it with fish.

When I talked with the folks from *Mother Earth News*, I laid out an even more important principle – that each crop must produce an annual gross minimum income of $3,000. I used this example: "If a farmer here in Alabama plants one acre of land in cotton, and has a good year, he can expect to get *one* bale of cotton from that acre. Now a bale weighs about

500 pounds, and cotton's selling for around 70 cents a pound, so the man's annual gross income off that piece of land will be $350. However, if he takes the same acre and plants it in collards, he can get 8,000 bunches of greens. By selling those for 50 cents a bunch, he'll gross $4,000. And then, if he plants both a spring and a fall crop of collards, he can take in as much as $8,000 per acre versus $350." You can see our plan here of what we recommend in Alabama.

Another principle is that the components of the farm be compatible and not compete with each other for labor. You don't want everything coming in at once. And the farm would provide year-round full employment for the farmer. When we set up the model at Tuskegee, we figured it ought to take two-and-a-half person-years of labor – maybe full-time work for a man, three-quarters-time for his wife, and one-quarter-time each for three teenage children. Or some combination like that.

Now here is the innovative twist to this farm. We recommend that each farmer develop a clientele membership club. One of these farms will supply the needs of 1,000 households. So we want the farmer's membership club to consist of 1,000 families, and we charge $25 to join. If you've got a pond, then we say the membership fee should be increased to $40. Being a member entitles the family to come to the farm and harvest everything themselves – except the sweet potatoes and honeybee products, which aren't pick-your-own crops – for 60 percent of what they would pay in the supermarket.

For this to work, the farm will have to be within 25 to 40 miles of a city, on a hard-surfaced road, so people can get to it. A good source of water is also important, since the whole farm needs to be under irrigation to maintain this kind of high-yield operation. Water weatherproofs the farm against drought and also against frost.

*Since the original intention was to devise a plan that would appeal to people who were already farming, Whatley is still surprised that he has not attracted as much interest from farmers as from people who are interested in starting farms.*

This plan appeals to highly trained professional people, dentists, engineers, doctors, lawyers. When we set out we intended to help the farmer that already owned land and equipment, had farming skills, was growing cotton, corn, soybeans, and was about to starve to death. We're appealing to some people like that, but not as many as I would like. My newsletter is an attempt to do that. I got the idea from reading the letters folks send me, telling me they don't understand the stuff they get from the USDA and from the extension service, or that it's too general and that kind of thing.

I don't have anything against large farmers. I was educated in the system and worked in it for 30 years. But the small farmer has a place in this country and is going to stay.

*Whatley remains confident that he will still be able to reach his original targeted audience. After his retirement from Tuskegee in 1981 he and Lottie Whatley, his wife and partner, established Whatley Farms and now devote a large share of their time to publicizing and refining the plan. The Southwest Self Help Association of Montgomery is using Whatley as a consultant to help them set up a model of his farm as a training site for local farmers. And they are currently negotiating the purchase of some land in the Montgomery area where they plan to set up a working model.*

*The Whatleys also write and distribute the* Small Farm Technical Newsletter *and have developed, in less than three years, a list of close to 8,000 subscribers. "We've got subscribers from every state in the union and from 20 foreign countries," says Whatley. One of his goals is to recruit and train coordinators for each state to act as advisers to individuals and organizations who wish to implement his plan. Thus far, he's already got coordinators for Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Texas, Kansas, Washington, and Oregon. He counsels that the plan is flexible and may vary from region to region, based on local food preferences and type of land available.*

In New York state you might grow Concord grapes. Yankees may not want to eat collard greens, but the principle I'm talking about is going to hold true. □

*Krista Brewer is a free-lance writer based in Atlanta.*

*The* ***Small Farm Technical Newsletter*** *costs $12 a year. The complete file of back issues, dating to October, 1981, is available for $40.80. Write Whatley Farms, Inc., P.O. Box 2827, Montgomery, AL 36105; (205) 265-7786 or 265-7754.*

# "Thought We Were Just *Some Poor Old Country People*"

**AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE BALANCE BY PHAYE POLIAKOFF**

*photos by Dan Hulburt*

*Alice Balance vividly remembers her early days on the land when she farmed full-time. "We were happy, we were truly happy," she says, mainly because her family was self-sufficient. It is a way of life that is mostly gone, but one from which a lot can be learned.*

*At 64, Balance has lived and worked in Windsor, a small town in Bertie County, North Carolina. As a child, she worked on the small farm her father owned. When she married, she and her husband started share-cropping. They raised their children on a farm until 1959, when they were forced off the land to make way for mechanized farming. In the 1960s, during what Balance calls the "protest days," she was part of the Free Bertie County Movement. While the group's original plans called for a supermarket, instead, 10 years later, they opened a rural day care center which serves 16 counties in northeastern North Carolina.*

*The indefatigable Alice still farms "a little piece" of land, cares for a few hogs and chickens, and directs Kiddie World Child Development Center. She is also president of the Rural Day Care Association of eastern North Carolina, vice chairman of the Bertie County Health Association, a board member of the governor's Health Advisory Board and the Northeastern North Carolina Tomorrow organization.*

*Balance's love of the land, her personal and intimate connection to it, and her realization of its importance form the foundation of her organizing efforts. In addition to working for advancements in rural health care, she is involved in the movement to stop black land loss. People in the eastern part of the state are poor and often powerless, and a takeover by superfarms and agribusiness threatens the region. Alice Balance wants to make sure this doesn't happen, and to ensure that the people who live there have opportunities to lead full lives. Here she talks about the self-sufficient old days.*

Yes indeed, I grew up on a farm, fortunately. Out there tilling the soil with our hands, there was a closeness to nature. It felt good knowing all

around you was family, it gave a sense of satisfaction. That's where most spirituals came from, people down working on the farm doing things with their hands. We were really happy in our large families. Each family had its own garden, and we were well fed. We had chickens, milk cows, and fruit – nobody really suffered from malnutrition – and good spiritual and cultural backgrounds.

Oh, in the afternoon we would sing, yes indeed. We would sing and somebody over in the headrow would pick up the song. We worked up to this headrow and would stand and sing and have a good time. As long as we could hear each other, we'd be singing. What did we sing? We came up with "Down Here Lord, Waiting on You." And my daddy had a poem that he loved to say:

*Down on the farm about half past four*
*I put on my pants and sneak out the door.*
*Out of the yard I run like the dickens*
*To milk 10 cows and feed the chickens.*

The people would laugh when Daddy said this. We just had a good time.

When I got married I moved off our family farm. My husband was a tenant farmer so we moved and were sharecropping. In those days you couldn't tell a sharecropper from a tenant farmer. They had sharecroppers that gave half to the landlord, and they had tenants that rented land from the landlord and worked it like they wanted to. In those times, you could really do your work and nobody would bother you. The landlords usually stayed in town; that's why you could always raise what you needed to eat. You didn't make all that much cash money; by the time you paid for your fertilizer and paid back the money that you borrowed to buy flour, sugar, straw hats, and overalls, you wouldn't have so much cash money left at the end of the year. But you always had your food.

When you were a tenant farmer or a sharecropper, you had plenty of place to grow your food. And you got all the fuel you wanted from the woods. We learned how to raise wheat and make our own flour, and we grew cane to make our own molasses. We could stay at home and grow our own food and be truly happy.

We got up at 5:30 in the morning. The husband went out to feed the team, and the wife would go in the kitchen to fix breakfast. After we finished breakfast, we would hook up the team of mules and go in the fields to work until noon. Then we'd come into the house and fix dinner and eat, and always go back to work at two o'clock. If you were real smart, after you fixed dinner, you could wash some clothes and hang them on the clothesline and be ready to go back in the field at two o'clock. We worked in the field until the sun set, then went home and fixed supper. While fixing supper, I'd heat some water so that everyone could wash up and get ready to go to bed. We'd be so tired we couldn't sit up for very long; we had to get up early the next morning.

After the growing season there was something called lay-by time, when we'd lay the crops by and didn't have to work on the farm. By that time the watermelons and the fruits were ripe and we would can – we did a lot of canning and preserving. After that lay-by time passed, it would be harvest time. That's when we would start picking the cotton and shaking the peanuts and getting ready for winter.

Our chief crop was cotton and peanuts. In our county we didn't grow as much tobacco as they did in other parts of the Carolinas. We raised peanuts, corn, cotton, soybeans, and hogs. We didn't raise hogs for the market but for our own use. We raised chickens for ourselves, and cows so

**"I CAN GO ACROSS THE FIELD WHEN I GET HOME AND FEED THE PIGS."**

we could have milk – we always had our own milk and butter. We'd also kill a beef and have that to eat. And we always had our gardens to raise vegetables to have something to give away or sell. Here we were, millionaires, but we thought we were just some poor old country people.

We had to stop farming when the landlord decided he could buy three or four tractors and hire three men to take care of the farm we were living on. There were six families living on this man's farm. He decided he could take all the land and tend the whole farm with three good men, a harvester, a distributor, and a planter. He forced all of us off the farm.

I think often about the six families that tended this man's land. He didn't have anything but his self and wife. Why would one man and his wife want everything that was raised on a farm that took care of six families? We had five children, and the other families had an average of five children. There were 42 people living on the farm. The landlord got half of everything we made, but that wasn't good enough. He wanted it all. So he displaced all these 42 people to take it all. Now he's so old, and he can't take it with him.

At first they let us live in the house. But you couldn't even have a garden; you could live in the house, but you couldn't farm the land. Maybe you could find a little bit of work on the farm. Afterward, they started moving the houses away, tearing them down, burning them up. We were forced off. We just had to get off and find somewhere else to live.

When the landlord took over, it split up our families and tore our communities apart. We were scattered; some neighbors never got to see each other any more. Some people migrated North and now they want to come back, but they don't have any place to come to. If you are fortunate enough to buy a lot, it's so small you can hardly get your septic tank and your pump on it. You don't have space enough left for a garden or a pig pen.

Leaving the farm really destroyed our life. Had we been able to stay and maintain our family, one of our sons would have stayed right there and farmed. My husband passed and I'm living by myself. If we were still on the farm I would be with my grandchildren and wouldn't be alone. The family would have always been together and there would always be a home for them to come back to.

All we ever did in our lives was farm. This is something to be proud of. I still believe that the farmers are the ones that feed the nation.

Today there is so much food wasted. I ride along and look across the fields. They waste corn, they waste peanuts. They have so many acres, they can't save it all. When we were farming those small farms, we didn't waste anything. If the peanuts shed off, we got out there and picked them up and we sold them. And the corn, we picked it up. What we didn't pick up, we left for the hogs. Look at the corn across the fields, that's all wasted. The machines can't get it all and they mash it underground, or you see ears of corn laying across the field. And cotton, oh my goodness, it's a shame the way they do cotton. There are machines now picking cotton and all that cotton is wasted. People could be out there working.

It's a shame to see food wasted when there are people hungry, without food to eat. School kids could go out and pick up this corn on a Saturday, sell it, and use the money for something. That would be a big help and give the kids something to do. But we can't do it because the land doesn't belong to us. These big farmers don't care if it's wasted. On a small farm, we got out there and made sure everything was picked up and used.

There was a time when people would send kids from the city to go down South and work on a farm. Now, the children in the country don't have anything to do because the parents don't have a farm for them to work on. These big landlords have all the land.

I just love the farm, I wouldn't be anywhere else. I have a son in New York who wants me to come live with him. I wouldn't live with him, sitting up in some ninth floor, looking out the window to see all the cars go by. I can go across the field down here when I get home and feed the pigs. I have a Perdue chicken house my son-in-law takes care of. He works in a mill down the road and his wife is a telephone operator. I've heard so many people say they wish they could come back down South and live on a farm, but they don't have anywhere to come. □

*Phaye Poliakoff conducted this interview as a part of the radio documentary series "Under All Is the Land," which she wrote and produced for WVSP radio in Warrenton, North Carolina, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. (See information about the series in the land resources section.) Phaye is now a free-lance writer living in Durham.*

**"WE GOT OUT THERE AND MADE SURE EVERYTHING WAS PICKED UP AND USED."**

# PIE

BY
SUSAN
BRIGHT

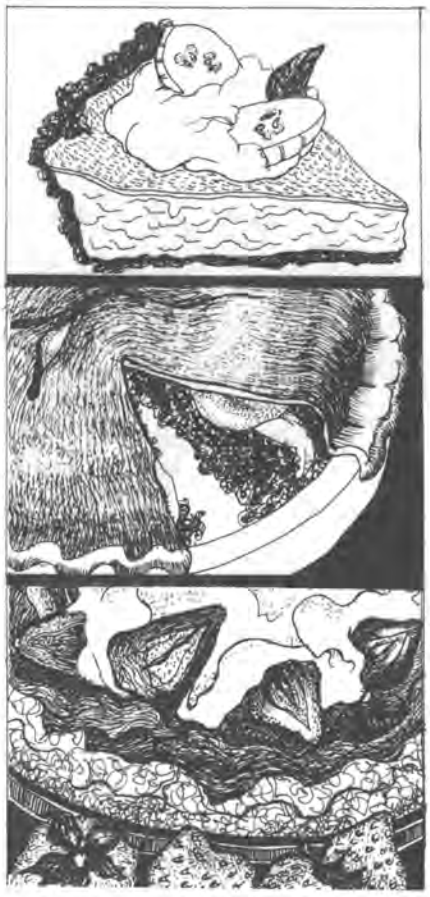


*Illustration by Patty Grossman*

Ice water. Two silver knives to work through the flour and shortening, add salt. It is an old art. Do not work late into the night, with sleep nipping at your sleeves you will fall off, wake up at three a.m. to a room full of smoke, two black disks in the oven, bad smell. Do not think about business, or the wave of darkness spreading through the Arts, do not think about depression looming on the horizon or the rhetoric and nonsense our leaders toss into its mouth, or the prospect of revolution in America, Zen. Concentrate on the art of pie. It is an old art. Ingredients spread through the house like a layer of snow, later people say: *O, Pie, Pie. We love pie.* It is a good art. No one will say make this pie with only one silver knife, or no ice, or make it with chalk instead of flour. Fill pie with ingredients at hand, cans of things, fresh fruit, cheese. Add it to a feast. Eat leftovers for breakfast the next day, the celebration begins again, pie filling the recesses of the body, exhilaration. Pie, it is an old art. If we lose it infants will wither in their mothers' stomachs, writhe at sunken nipples, men will lose direction, US STEEL will manufacture rubber and the pillars of society will flop around like spangles on a half-mast flag. Pie. The planets are lined up – Saturn, Uranus, Mars, Jupiter, pulling earthquakes, pulling poison from beneath the surface. Pie, cut through the mix gently, roll out a layer of wood and flour, pie. Flute the edges, pour in apples and cinnamon and spices. Pie. Zen. Concentrate on the art of pie. The rites of passage pull us through gates of depression and war. We shall make pie. Cannot resist. We shall celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July; holidays shall find us traversing the continent in search of heritage. *No one makes pie like mother does.* Pie. No one says one pie should represent all pies. Pie is like a thumb print. Some are sour. Pie is silent, making only a light simmering noise as it bakes in the oven. It spreads scent gently into our hearts. There is ceremony as pie is lifted out of the heat. They gather. *O, Pie. The clutter is swept away, space around pie is brought to sharp focus.* Light pours down on pie. Concentrate. The art of pie is an old one. Try to imagine life without it. Like the unveiling of a great painting, breaking a champagne bottle over the bow of a ship going off to sea, the ceremony as a cornerstone is laid, pie. Do not roll the crust too thick, roll gently or the center will unfurl, rub extra flour on the rolling pin every fourth stroke, remember these things. Create pie often so the art is not lost. Do not forget temperature. Cold is essential, then heat. You must have an oven, cannot make pie over an open fire or in a barbecue pit. Be firm with those who insist pie can be made in a crock pot or on the back window ledge of a Pontiac left out in August sunlight. Respect the rules of pie.

*Sing a song of six pence/ A pocket full of rye/ Four and twenty black birds/ Baked in a pie.*
*When the pie was opened/ The birds began to sing/*

Pie

*Susan Bright is a poet and art-based learning consultant. She is currently an instructor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio.*

# WHAT'S GOOD TO EAT?

The girl with the cotton candy pictured here is out on the town for a day of fun. She may well eat a nutritious, balanced diet on a normal day; for the moment, though, she is indulging in the ultimate junk food, nothing but sugar and air, a food with no redeeming value. Yet who among us hasn't stood at a fair or carnival watching the pink sugar being spun into fluff and then walked off munching a puff?

None of us eats a steady diet of cotton candy, so what's the harm? Not much, probably. But too many of us eat a steady diet that is harmful to our vitality and health; too few of us know or care enough about our nutritional needs to change our eating habits.

Responsible nutritionists have been telling us for years that the typical American diet is killing us, but most of us don't listen, continuing to eat too many calories, too much refined sugar, too many fats, and too much salt. And most of us rely on over-processed, refined foods, which have lost much of their nutrition and had salt, preservatives, chemicals, and food colorings added in the processing.

The links between nutrition and health – or nutrition and disease, if you prefer – are well-established, although most nutritionists and some doctors don't think a nutritional approach to health care is awarded its proper place of importance by the medical profession. An Atlanta doctor who bases his practice on nutrition and prevention of disease talked with *Southern Exposure* – see page 38. And a dietician has offered some pointers on what's wrong with the typical diet and what to do about improving it – see page 40.

One major reason why so many of us eat improperly is that we've never learned differently. In recent years nutrition activists have increasingly turned their attention to what we're teaching our children about food – and they have been dismayed at what they find. *Nutrition Action* magazine, for example, recently examined the five best-selling health textbooks and said, "It would be no surprise if schoolchildren thought the most pressing problems posed by inadequate nutrition were beriberi, pellagra, and scurvy, for rarely is heard a discouraging word about high-sugar, -fat, -salt, or low-fiber diets."

After much research and deliberation, the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs established seven sensible U.S. dietary goals in its 1977 report. All five of the textbooks have been updated since 1980, but only *Modern Health*, published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, mentions the dietary goals, and all five are deficient in major ways. As one editor told *Nutrition Action*, a consensus must be established before contemporary issues can be included in the text. It seems the consensus must include the processors of highly refined foods and the makers of food additives. Another editor admitted that they studiously avoid information that might be controversial and detrimental to the food business.

No wonder then that children fall so easily into the bad eating patterns of their elders. No one is teaching them that those patterns are wrong. Almost no one, anyway. There *are* community food activists out there trying to improve the quality of nutrition education. One group that developed a curriculum and a program in Nashville had some success for a time. Its story begins on the next page. □

# ECLIPSE OF THE BLUE MOON FOODS

## A REPORT FROM NASHVILLE

VITAMINS AND MINERALS CONTROL THE PROCESSES OF THE BODY, LIKE A TRAFFIC OFFICER.

**Scene 1**: Participants in a church study group on hunger are gathering together in the soft drink aisle of a large supermarket. For the past hour they have been using the supermarket as a classroom for a discussion of the present food system.

"In 1976 each American drank an average of 493 eight-ounce servings of soda pop," the leader announces. Moving to the Coke counter she asks the group to guess how many teaspoons of sugar there are in a 12-ounce bottle. "Two." "Five." "Nine teaspoons," she replies, "and its advertising budget is over $100 million a year."

She further explains that Coca-Cola earns 50 percent of its profits overseas and that its replacement of milk, juice, and water has exacerbated the problems of hunger and malnutrition in Third World countries.

"Okay, now let's move to the cereal aisle where we'll find that 90 percent of the market is controlled by just four companies."

**Scene 2**: A group of sixth graders are nervously assembling their props while their teacher adjusts the camera and videotape machine. "Now remember to speak up and face the camera during your entire commercial," announces the teacher. "Ready, ACTION."

"Hi! I'm Morgan Whitehead and I'm here in Ogers Food Store to see what people think of Fry's greasy yucky potato chips and our own natural delicious potato." (He walks up to an old lady.) "Excuse me, ma'am – but I wonder if you can tell me which one you prefer."

"Why, the potato, of course! Those potato chips are so greasy and all that fat and salt is just not good for my heart. I have high blood pressure, you know."

"Well, there you heard it, folks. She prefers the incredible edible potato. Buy it!"

"CUT."

Such activities are taking place as part of food education programs going on across the country. The development of these programs reflects a growing awareness among educators and community people that the decisions we make about food – what we buy, and where and whom we buy it from – have an impact far beyond determining what we will eat for dinner that night. As opposed to the nutrition classes you may remember from school in which discussion was confined to the four basic food groups, the new food education programs may ask students to consider in some detail the effects of diet on health, the influence of advertising on food choice, the amount of energy it takes to produce different kinds of food, and whether family farmers in this country and overseas are benefitting from our eating and buying habits. Students of all ages come to learn that food decisions are political decisions; that their food dollars can support an increasingly monopolistic food industry *or* can support their local economy through alternatives such as farmers' markets, food co-ops, and their own backyard gardens.

Nashville, Tennessee, has been the scene of an especially exciting community project for food education in the public schools. The Cooperative Food Education Program was a joint effort by community organizations and the Nashville school system to develop a creative approach to teaching food awareness involving students, teachers, parents, food service workers, administrators, and community resources. The initial idea for the program came from two nonprofit groups who were working together on organizing a school breakfast program in Nashville: Manna, a local anti-hunger coalition, and the Agricultural Marketing Project (AMP), a statewide organization addressing marketing problems of small farmers.

In January of 1977, a group of parents and teachers from Cavert School came to Manna with their concerns about the children's poor eating habits and periods of hyperactivity. They had noticed that the

students were quieter and more attentive after lunch than in the morning and had found that many children were eating little or no breakfast for both economic and social reasons. The parent-teacher group was aware of the fact that a good breakfast increases learning potential and attentiveness. Working together with the staff of Manna, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), and AMP, they documented the need for and feasibility of a federally funded school breakfast program. A pilot program was instituted shortly thereafter, and expansion of the breakfast program to other area schools soon followed.

The parents and teachers at Cavert also identified other food problems faced by the students. The group felt that the meals served in the cafeteria were too high in sugar, salt, and fat, and deficient in whole grains and fresh produce. Many of the children suffered from diet-related problems such as obesity and tooth decay. At the time, there was no nutrition education program in the school.

In response to the concern shown by the community, Manna and AMP undertook to develop a food education program that would embody their own philosophy and goals. Besides working toward the expansion and increased utilization of the federal feeding programs, Manna placed importance on education as a crucial tool to help families make wise food choices. AMP, concerned about the lack of awareness of locally grown food among children and their families, viewed education as a way to generate support for local farmers. In addition, AMP saw the possibility that the school system could buy food from area growers for its feeding programs.

In the fall of 1977, each organization hired an additional staff person. Nance Pettit, a VISTA worker with a degree in psychology and experience teaching outdoor education, joined Manna. Ellen Weiss, whose academic background was in chemistry and nutrition, was hired by AMP. One of the first things the new staffers did was to visit elementary school principals and teachers who were known for either their interest in nutrition or their willingness to try a new program. Most of the people Pettit and Weiss questioned were very interested in new approaches and materials for teaching food education.

As a follow-up to these meetings, two days of workshops on food education were held in October. While the overall turnout was light, a number of local teachers, parents, school social workers, day care home providers, and nutritionists attended the workshops. The sessions not only helped to bring interested people together, they also helped Weiss and Pettit clarify the approach and strategies they would use in the schools.

From the school visits and the food education workshops, a small group of interested teachers and principals was identified, and Weiss and Pettit arranged monthly in-service teacher training workshops at Donelson Elementary School on topics chosen by the faculty. At Dodson Elementary School, Pettit arranged to work directly with Dot Nixon, a fourth and fifth grade science and social studies teacher, to try out new curriculum ideas twice a week. After introducing new materials to teachers, Weiss and Pettit would usually go into the classroom and conduct a program for the children. This would help sustain the momentum and interest generated in the teacher workshop.

**CARBOHYDRATES ARE FUEL, LIKE GAS FOR YOUR CAR.**

Slowly the two staffers began to expand their work to other schools and involve more people. In February, 1978, they sent 700 brochures on the program to principals, PTA presidents, food service managers, and selected teachers. As a result more workshops and programs were held.

This first year of working in the schools proved to be an educational process for Weiss and Pettit. They learned how to work with teachers effectively, what teachers needed to develop a food curriculum, and how to structure training workshops. They also discovered the kinds of activities that excited kids. The most successful activities were planning lunch menus for the cafeteria, videotaping student-produced commercials for nutritious foods, food preparation and tasting, and planting spring vegetable gardens.

At the end of the program's first year, comments and letters from students, parents, and teachers indicated a positive change in the children's food preferences; in addition, the emphasis on better nutrition helped the Dodson cafeteria to operate in the black for the first time in seven years.

For that first year, most of the costs of the program had been absorbed by Manna and AMP, although food used in the classroom was usually paid for by the schools. In June, 1978, Weiss and Pettit were ready to apply for funds to expand the program in the following academic year, but efforts to get financial support from the various federal nutrition programs failed.

This funding crisis caused AMP and Manna to step back and re-think the goals and methodology of the food education program. They decided to continue to support the program and agreed to target fifth and sixth grade students. They felt that children of this age group were old enough to understand consumer concepts, but still young enough to be flexible in their taste preferences.

Weiss and Pettit visited the three elementary district directors in the fall of 1978. These directors helped identify four schools willing to participate in the program planned for the spring of 1979. The schools were Dodson and Donelson, two middle class suburban schools in which the women had already worked, and Ford Greene and Cora Howe, both inner-city schools with large percentages of low-income students.

Using the five teaching packets produced the previous year as core material, they then developed an 18-lesson curriculum guide for fifth and sixth grade teachers, eventually called *Eclipse of the Blue Moon Foods* — the "blue moon foods" being those kids should eat only once in a blue moon.

Instead of focusing on food groups and nutrients, these lessons focused on food: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, lean meat, and low fat dairy products. Other topics covered were food preparation, gardening, menu

planning, label reading, advertising, and energy in the food system. Each lesson included background information on the topic, activities for the classroom, worksheets, and extra challenges for students to do on their own. Teachers in the four schools were trained on how to use the material on an individual and a group basis. Weiss and Pettit went into the classroom only when teachers were having difficulty with a particular lesson. This enabled the faculty to begin to assume responsibility for the program on an on-going basis.

In the course of the second year, good relationships were established and direct support for the program was received from school administrators, principals, and the food services department. The school system's evaluation department designed "before" and "after" tests for students and a teacher needs assessment. Answer sheets and computer time were also donated.

The food service director allowed the students to plan lunches for the cafeteria to be served during special menu weeks. Principals set up meetings with PTA presidents to plan parent food education programs, introduced Weiss and Pettit to the cafeteria managers, and set aside time for teacher training during faculty meetings.

An additional boost for the program occurred when contact was made with the Agricultural Extension Service's Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). EFNEP is a federally funded program that provides information on food budgeting, food preparation, and nutrition to low-income families. In the early part of 1979, Nashville EFNEP designated three staff members to work with youth on food issues via the school system and coordination with AMP and Manna soon followed. Because of the involvement of three community organizations, the project became known as the Cooperative Food Education Program (CFEP).

A grant for the Tennessee Nutrition Education and Training (NET) program in June, 1979, helped CFEP expand to 12 elementary schools. It paid for workbooks and teachers' guides and allowed each school to buy a small cooking appliance for classroom food preparation, plant a spring vegetable garden, videotape student-produced commercials for nutritious foods, and have tasting parties with fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and whole grain foods.

During this third year, the program again sought to involve parents and food service staff. Films, discussions, and student skits were part of PTA presentations on food education. One workshop was held for parents of children who attended Title I schools and included a "make and do" session that involved creating food games and preparing nutritious snacks. Weiss and Pettit wrote a 16-page information and activity booklet for families called *Eclipse of the Blue Moon Foods: A Nutra-Trek That Boldly Goes Where No Family Has Gone Before*, and distributed it to every child participating in program activities.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, students were tested before


and after the program to measure changes in knowledge, likes and dislikes, frequency of eating certain foods, and preference for foods served in the cafeteria. As expected, the greatest change was in knowledge. Teachers, principals, and cafeteria managers were also surveyed and their responses were highly favorable. Eighty-four percent of the teachers that responded felt that the students had made some changes in preference or attitude toward food. For the next academic year, 74 percent of the teachers said they would teach *Eclipse of the Blue Moon Foods* either as a sequential program or as a complete 18-lesson unit. All of the principals who responded said they would like food education to be taught again the following year.

Another outcome was the favorable response of two elementary school principals to the idea of purchasing fruits and vegetables for their school cafeterias directly from an AMP-organized farmer cooperative. These principals were able to get permission to buy local produce from the co-op.

Although the NET grant was a step forward in getting the school system to assume responsibility for the food education program, it did not dismantle all obstacles that CFEP encountered. The project people never managed to get school administrators to hire a full-time nutrition educator. There *is* a health education coordinator but she cannot devote much time to nutrition because it is only one of five areas for which she is responsible.

But food education continues in the Nashville schools. Ellen Weiss and Nance Pettit have gone on to other things, and there are no longer any federal funds available for nutrition education. Now it's up to individual teachers to do the job, and some who got enthusiastically involved during the days of CFEP remain. The enthusiasm came from their experiences with kids. As one teacher wrote in a letter to the project staff:

"In April my class won a Coke party for being the class with the most money for magazine sales. Needless to say, they were excited about it when it was announced that morning. Later on in the day, my class viewed the film *Eat, Drink, and Be Wary* and they were quite impressed. So impressed that, at 11:30, a group consisting of almost my entire class approached me and asked if they could have orange juice instead of Cokes. Stunned, I asked why and was bombarded with all of the information they had acquired from the film. Many declared they would never touch Cokes again." □

*This article is adapted from the* ***Community Food Education Handbook****, a 65-page report on organizing a program like the one in Nashville, writen by Ellen Weiss, Harriet Davidson, Laurie Heise, and Nance Pettit. Published with the permission of Manna, 1502 Edgehill Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212; (615)242-3663. The drawings, by Bob Durham and Victor Lovera, are from the* ***Eclipse of the Blue Moon Foods*** *student workbook.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. JAMES CARTER
BY CHRISTINA DAVIS

# YOUR HEALTH IS IN YOUR POWER

*"As medicine moves toward the twenty-first century it is being transformed into a holistic model, emphasizing health promotion and disease prevention. Within this model nutrition will play a major role in re-establishing the balance of health and well-being."*

– James H. Carter, Jr., M.D.
Atlanta

*Dr. James Carter is an assistant professor of family and community medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, and medical director of the Center for Preventive Medicine. As a teaching professor and health care practitioner, Dr. Carter advocates and employs a holistic approach incorporating nutrition in the prevention and treatment of illness. Dr. Carter recently spoke to* ***Southern Exposure*** *editor Christina Davis about preventive medicine and self-reliance in community health care.*

In preventive medicine, the important premise is that health is not something the doctor gives you, it is something you can have and control personally.

I graduated from Howard University School of Medicine, did my internship at Harlem Hospital, and returned to Howard for my residency in family practice. To deal with what I was seeing every day, I began to search for more than the skills and training I had as an acute-care physician. People came into the hospital with varying degrees of chronic illness and disease and left with literally bags of pills and the absence of health.

As I watched this, I became interested in ways to intervene before wellness was beyond recovery. Naturally, this set me on the course of taking a look at the whole system of health. The essence of the holistic approach to medicine involves dealing with all the elements in the system – physical, social, mental, and spiritual – and exploring nutrition, because nutrients are the basis of the formation of cells and tissues. Our closest link to the environment is through nutrition.

When I went to Tuskegee, Alabama, to do two years of work in public health, I was introduced to a rural community. While there, I received a grant to do some work in this community from the Wheatridge Philanthropic Organization, located in Chicago. As a result, an experimental two-year project, called the Center for Holistic Health and Wellness, was started. There were real challenges and resistance in this setting. And, even though there was a community advisory board and an educational program going on in the schools and community, because of misconceptions the center drew criticism from many organizations. Also, other physicians in the community did not readily support the center because it focused on alternatives to medication and surgery and took a basic look at lifestyles, patterns, and habits to promote wellness.

The center failed to remain open much beyond the two-year pilot period. This was largely due to fears of "mysticism" surrounding holism, reluctance on the part of the community as a whole, and the lack of available resources to continue this type of program in a rural setting. But for me it was the basis for a lot of learning and continued research in the area of nutrition therapy and preventive medicine.

Comparing the rural Alabama setting with my earlier experiences in urban settings, I discovered that the average American diet is high in fat, sugar, salt, and processed foods with assorted chemicals. Such a diet predisposes one to multiple vitamin and mineral deficiencies that in turn lead to chronic degenerative diseases – heart disease, cancer, hypertension, diabetes, and so on. Even when one considers disparities among us, rural and urban, access and isolation, poverty and affluence, black and white, heredity and culture, we are all subject to and products of this fast-food culture. And I have found that the greatest degree of resistance to dietary changes is met from patients who refuse to give up adopted and learned, yet unhealthy, patterns of eating. Rich and poor alike are dying from the same diseases.

DR. CARTER REVIEWS A CHART WITH INTERNS AT SOUTHWEST COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

*photo by Jocelyn Y. Johnson*

Preventive medicine and the use of nutrition therapy in the prevention and treatment of illness are not new. Practiced for centuries in Africa, where medicine had its genesis, preventive medicine was first taken up by segments of the American medical profession as early as the turn of the century, and it flourished during the 1920s and '30s. Resistance then, as now, came from the scientific community as the influence and control of the petrochemical and pharmaceutical interests increased.

The use of the term "holistic" also conjured up in the minds of many individuals images of mysterious and "unscientific" healing techniques, many of which can be traced to their sources in ancient Africa, especially within the mystery schools of Egypt. Orthodox Western physicians have not even begun to fathom the knowledge and wisdom of these ancient healers. The fact that the dynamics of the universe and other spiritual factors are a part of medicine in the holistic spectrum brought challenges from many critics.

In addition, the advent of the industrial revolution fostered a fascination with machines and gadgets and resulted in the dehumanization of medicine. Thus, the focus on medications and surgery – the mainstay and fabric of today's $287 billion health care industry – forced preventive medicine into an inner circle and out of the reach of many needy individuals.

But in the 1960s and '70s, preventive medicine became a real concern, and it is even more prevalent in the '80s. This is evidenced by the focus and direction of public health at the black medical schools, Howard, Meharry, and Morehouse. There is now a recognition of the need for a new concept of teaching in medicine, particularly for prevention. Teaching doctors to be more aware of human alternatives to the treatment of disease is one focus. Along with this, there is an attempt to incorporate into medical school curricula nutrition education and psychosomatic medicine, heretofore missing dimensions in medical training.

And, while there is some concern that not enough doctors and other health-care practitioners are coming out of today's schools, when we consider the increase in the number of doctors over the last 10 years, I have to disagree. What is needed is for more health-conscious practitioners to change the values of today's medical system – and commit themselves to development of community-based preventive medicine centers where people are taught how to be healthy and how to maximize their human potential.

Put the people directly in charge of their health and wellness. I do not say that there is no need for hospitals; what I'm saying is people need to know that they have the skills to keep themselves healthy. Then the major role of the practitioner becomes that of educator – providing a one-to-one level of consultation, teaching how current lifestyle patterns conflict with health and good nutrition, and developing maintenance plans to minimize the degree of professional intervention.

Health is not something the doctor gives you, it is something you develop and maintain by the way you think and live. It is this premise that we operate from at the Center for Preventive Medicine, and it's the teaching philosophy we apply at Morehouse. And so, to develop a wellness prescription, when new patients come to visit the center, we first discuss with them hereditary patterns of illness, risk factors, stress, environmental considerations, and other physio-social factors to determine problems that exist and the potential for others.

Next, we do a nutritional evaluation using computerized analysis to provide a breakdown of what patients consume and deficiencies in their diet. This is an indicator of the kinds of changes they must make nutritionally. Then we jointly design an exercise program tailored to the tolerance level and needs of the patient, and teach stress management techniques. Finally, we discuss and decide upon a maintenance program. This is based on another premise, that health is a state of choice and is contingent upon maintaining a balance with nature. And it is really remarkable; when people are given these basics and understand their choices, they opt for greater health through their own participation. □

photo © 1977 by John Spragens, Jr.

# EAT FOR GOOD HEALTH

Good nutrition is a key component of wellness, as the preceding interview with Dr. James Carter makes clear. Malnutrition is known to increase the body's susceptibility to infection and retard its ability to recover. Specific nutrient deficiencies and excesses have been linked to conditions such as hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease, and cancer.

Certain vitamins, minerals, and other substances are often touted as "magic" cures or productive agents. Vitamin C, selenium, chromium, vitamin E — these are a few popular supplements marketed as miracle cures. While these compounds are all essential to the body, it is important to remember that they are readily available in food and are amply provided in a balanced diet. Excessive consumption via supplements such as these, however, can have toxic consequences.

What should a "balanced" diet include? We do know that the "typical American diet" is not balanced, it is too high in fat (especially animal fat), sugar, salt, and often calories. On the other hand, it is too low in fiber, vitamins such as A, C, and folate, and minerals such as calcium, iron, potassium, and zinc. Correcting these imbalances means changing eating habits.

Nutritionists generally categorize foods as belonging to one of four basic food groups. The consumer of the "typical American diet" would do well to make some changes in what she or he eats from each group, in the interest of better health and a more balanced diet.

In the milk and milk products group, eat more of the low-fat products: skim or low-fat (1 percent) milk and low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese, and cheese. Drink less whole milk, except for infants who need the extra fat content. Eat less butter, cream cheese, and ice cream.

In the protein group, get more of your protein from legumes (dried beans and peas) combined with whole grains to provide complete protein. The beef, chicken, turkey, and fish you eat should be lean. Consume fewer fatty cuts of meat, fried meats and fatback, and processed meats like sausage, hot dogs, bologna, and so forth.

In the fruits and vegetables group, eat more fresh produce of all kinds, especially citrus fruit and dark green and yellow fruits and vegetables. Use fewer canned products that are processed with salt and/or sugar.

In the breads and cereals group, eat more whole-grain bread and flour, whole-grain cereals like wheat, oats, and rye, and brown rice and millet, and less white bread and flour, presweetened cereals, white rice, and bakery goods made with white flour and sugar.

Drink more water and cut way down on white sugar, salt, and the caffeine in coffee, tea, and soft drinks, substituting molasses, honey, and caffeine-free beverages. □

*Marci Kramish, R.D., M.P.H., is a clinical associate with the Department of Community and Family Medicine of Duke University Medical Center.*

# CO-OPS

Commmunity cooperation is not an idea that is new to the South. Traditionally, rural societies have always banded together to get work done. Some of the more common cooperative practices have centered around the production and distribution of food. The repair and maintenance of outbuildings, barnraising, slaughtering and dressing animals, canning, harvesting, and gardening are all examples of shared tasks that earned those who participated either a share of the produce or reciprocal labor.

While the change to a cash economy has diminished these practices, it has not eliminated them. Many people with families living in rural areas still share in the upkeep and maintenance of commonly owned property. Those who are not available to provide labor may contribute cash, entitling them to share in the garden produce, fruits and nuts, meats, and even profits from the cash crops. Urbanization and industrialization have isolated many people, and the idea that personal benefits may be gained by sharing work and resources with other people is not as widely shared as in the past. Yet, the tradition is a strong one, and cooperation is a viable alternative to the wasteful, expensive marketing systems which now control our access to food.

In the South today more and more people are again turning toward cooperative ventures, for both economic and political reasons. These co-ops draw upon many of the same philosophies by which communities have worked together in the past, except that now they are more frequently formally structured, with responsibilities more specifically delineated.

There are two basic types of cooperatives, producer and consumer, and both represent a wide range of interests. Historically, however, producer co-ops have been primarily agricultural. With the cost of farm machinery so high, and the market for selling the crops competitive, it made economic sense for farmers to collaborate and share in the purchasing, production, and marketing.

Consumer co-ops have traditionally been food cooperatives. Individuals wanting choices of food that is both nutritious and inexpensive band together into food buying clubs and storefront co-ops. Membership in a food cooperative also enables consumers to exercise choice about where their food comes from and thus react to the advertising myths fed to shoppers by supermarket consumerism.

The politics of both types of cooperatives vary from co-op to co-op. However, by coming together and working cooperatively, individuals have already made a basic "political" decision. The cooperative alternative illustrates an attempt to address the issues centering on the corporate control of food production and distribution, and to restore a sense of self-reliance and respect for the land to community members.

The potential for education and change through cooperative endeavors is great. Because each member of a cooperative must assume some responsibility in the functioning of the co-op, members are frequently participating in differing degrees of decison-making which will determine the extent to which the co-op will be politically defined. For example, in the case of producer cooperatives, questions will arise concerning how to market the products and to whom they will be sold. Will the best price offered be the criterion on which to base this decision, or will a specific market be targeted, and if so, for what reasons? Similarly, members of food cooperatives must make decisions concerning food policy. Where does the food come from? Is it locally grown? What about carrying pre-packaged processed products from large corporations? In what kinds of activities are these conglomerates involved both here and abroad and would the co-op support these? Will the co-op promote the efforts of organized workers and boycott products? What about food that is sprayed with pesticides and other chemicals? How will "nutritious" be defined, and by whom?

The philosophical stance of a co-op is reflective of the membership. Commonality of interest among members of a homogeneous group is conducive to cohesiveness and basic agreement on the co-op's orientation, both of which add to the longevity and stability of the co-op. However, such homogeneity may also breed a kind of exclusivity that limits access. A more diversified membership, on the other hand, may have a more difficult time trying to arrive at any kind of political position, yet because of this variety among the membership, such a co-op does not seem to be in danger of insulating itself as narrowly.

Each of the three cooperatives profiled in the following pages has a different story to tell. The Hilton Head Island Fishing Cooperative, on the South Carolina coast, is a producer co-op originally formed for economic purposes. The New River Trading Company in Hinton, West Virginia, is typical of food cooperatives organized by individuals seeking alternatives to corporate control over food choices. The Acadian Delight Bakery and Grocery in Lake Charles, Louisiana, under the umbrella of the Southern Consumers Cooperative, formed their producer co-op as a community development effort, and it has served as a springboard to involvement in a variety of community-oriented projects. □

COOPS

# A VENTURE INTO FRUITCAKE
# ACADIAN DELIGHT BAKERY

BY HELEN CORDES

On a sunny Saturday in October, 1983, the Acadian Delight Bakery of Lake Charles, Louisiana, held a party. It was the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the bakery, Lake Charles's only black-owned and -operated cooperative business.

The Acadian Delight began as an experiment in black economic self-sufficiency; it has not only survived two decades but has also spawned a number of other ventures, including a small loan co-op for the black community of nearby Lafayette and a flourishing development fund that sustains cooperatives all over the South.

The board members of the bakery's umbrella group – the Southern Consumers Cooperative (SCC) – had much to celebrate as they gathered at the bakery around a table loaded with ribs, chicken, sweet potatoes, cakes, and cookies. Outside the bakery, a local soul station turned up the volume on their special live broadcast of the birthday. Inside, Acadian Delight's bakers arranged trays full of free bakery samples, including several kinds of cookies, brownies, and pecan-studded chunks of the bakery's specialty: fruitcake.

It was the redolent, rich fruitcake that sparked the co-op in the first place. The Reverend A.J. McKnight, a Catholic priest who was then setting up literacy programs in south Louisiana, saw a co-op bakery as a way to cultivate both skills and independence.

"Father McKnight wanted blacks to begin owning and controlling their own businesses," recalls Christiana Smith, an SCC board member who has been a moving force since its inception in 1959. "But he realized he had to start with literacy." Smith remembers black adults lining up to learn to read and write at McKnight's program in Lafayette. "Everybody came," she says. "It was the first time anything like that happened."

Smith had been teaching school since 1938, and she felt the same burning ache to see the black community on its feet. "We had nothing going," she says, a frown flitting across a still smooth face, which reflects her Louisiana Indian ancestry. "Blacks were just existing."

Alfred McZeal remembers the feeling, too. McZeal, current general manager of SCC, was making $40 a week then at Morgan and Lindsay, a Lafayette five and dime. Friends told him of the meetings McKnight was holding where co-ops and credit unions were discussed. To most people in the rural and undeveloped parishes of Louisiana, these were foreign terms; curious, McZeal attended.

"I went and asked, 'What is a co-op?' They told me, 'Co-ops are a way to own and control business and create more jobs.' I said, 'Wow.' To me these were beautiful words."

SCC members began selling $5 shares in 1961 – and McZeal bought his. He started going door-to-door after-hours from his job at Morgan and Lindsay, selling co-op shares for a commission. His enthusiasm for the concept seemed contagious and he quickly became a top share-seller.

"About this time, Morgan and Lindsay closed," says McZeal, "and Reverend McKnight asked if I would work for SCC full-time. He offered me $60 a week. I took it, but I didn't believe they'd be able to afford to keep me."

Support for the co-op did keep growing, however, and finally attracted the eye of Washington, DC. The Acadian Delight Bakery received the nation's first War on Poverty loan. A black and white photograph of a beaming Vice President Hubert Humphrey holding the $25,000 check is still displayed on a bulletin board at the bakery.

ACADIAN DELIGHT BAKERS, FROM LEFT, IDA BABINAUX, LAURA RIVERA, AND LAVINIA COMEAUX.

*photo by Helen Cordes*

More than on government loans, the bakery rested on the dreams and enthusiasm of the co-op members. "It was our baby," recalls McZeal with a wide grin that highlights the laugh lines on his round, cheerful face. "It also became our university."

The first few years were flush. "We had 35 employees," says Laura Rivera, who was then manager. "We were putting fruitcakes out by the ton," in addition to a full bakery fare. Much of the business was in mail orders from companies from California to New York.

As with most learning experiences,

there were a few hitches. Recalls McZeal, "We got this 'expert' who told us he could have the bakery making $1 million in six months. In the next year, we lost $200,000. We basically made too many cakes and couldn't sell them."

With the disappointing deficits, "we lost a lot of steam," McZeal says. The bakery tried to market "stage planks," a thick moist slab of gingery cookie. "It sold good, but not good enough."

Eventually, the bakery was open only a few months during the holiday season for fruitcake production. Meanwhile, bakery shelves were converted for sales of groceries, sandwiches, and liquor, and their sales offset bakery losses.

However, the baker board members, especially McZeal, didn't want to let go of the fruitcake idea. "I just didn't want to say quit," McZeal says. "I had rassled with those fruitcakes so long that Acadian Delight had become a part of me."

So, in August of 1983, the bakery ovens were heated up again and the results have been good. "Bakery sales are well over 50 percent of the total sales here," says store manager Larry Bellow. Last month, bakery sales were up to $14,000. Rivera, baking again at Acadian Delight, reports that lemon meringue, blueberry, and sweet potato pies are fast sellers. She's not concerned that the shares haven't paid off yet. "Someday," she says quietly, "they will."

McZeal predicts continued success. "We sold 29,000 fruitcakes last year and I bet we double that this year. We do have the best fruitcake in the world."

During the years that the bakery struggled to survive, several other programs developed under the SCC umbrella. People's Enterprises, which grants household loans to the black community at lower than conventional rates, remains a key component. "We're charging 14 percent, compared to 16 to 18 percent downtown," said manager Howard McZeal. "Last year, we granted about 200 loans for a total of about $250,000."

Crucial to People's Enterprises is its technical assistance services. "We teach people how to manage their money, and it makes a lot of difference," says Howard McZeal. This service, plus a no-nonsense loan payback policy, has paid off for People's Enterprises. "For the first time in 10 years, People's Enterprises is finally in the black," triumphs Alfred McZeal.

Another successful SCC project was its move in 1973 to build itself a new office building and rent out much of the space to other small businesses. SCC also invested $18,000 in land adjacent to the office building, which they sold recently for $220,000. They also own a rental house and a trailer park.

One SCC offspring did not fare so well. In 1965, SCC's Southern Consumer Education Foundation was making big gains in the community with a Head Start program. In addition to the pre-school program they also offered remedial education, voter education, and legal help. Alfred McZeal contends that these successful programs were too threatening to the white community.

"The school board here didn't even try for the Head Start funds at first," he says. "But then they saw the government contract was awarding $1 million, then $2 million the second year to us to run the program. We were making jobs for people, and this was threatening."

McZeal says the group was accused of "being communist," apparently in part because one staff member had been on an exchange trip to Russia while in college. "The state legislature spent $50,000 investigating us," he recalls. "They seized all our books. Of course, they could find nothing about communism. But by the time we took it to court and were exonerated, the federal government had been scared off," says McZeal. "The school board then got the contract. It also took us a long time to counteract the bad image. But we did."

Efforts of the Educational Foundation continue, however, with a scholarship fund that annually awards around $4,000 to 10 college-bound blacks.

**CHRISTIANA SMITH BEFORE THE BAKERY DISPLAY CASE.**

*photo by Helen Cordes*

The money comes from a 1 percent salary contribution from SCC staffers. The foundation also holds "Black Citizen Award Nights" to cite individuals who've been especially responsive to the community.

Perhaps the most far-reaching educational tool is the monthly *Southern Consumer Times*, begun in 1976. The tabloid tackles community issues the Lafayette dailies ignore, says McZeal. Now self-supporting through advertising, the *Times* is distributed free, mostly in area churches.

SCC's biggest offspring, though, has been the Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF). The SCDF funnels loans to co-ops of all descriptions – food, health, farming, community development – in 16 Southern states. Through its technical assistance division, SCDF teaches co-ops about everything from profitability techniques and management training to evaluation systems to help stabilize businesses.

McZeal learned long ago why such development agencies are paramount. "The co-op had needed a $5,000 loan, and we thought that with the $20,000 in assets we had at the time, it would be no problem," remembers McZeal. "But we went to the downtown banks and they sent us away quick."

It's a different story now for SCDF's 74 members, who are also shareholders. They've used SCDF to realize a rainbow of dreams – from the Greenhale Sewing Cooperative of Greensboro, Alabama, to the Citizens Coal in Clintwood, Virginia, to the St. Landry Low Income Housing in Palmetto, Louisiana, to the Sea Island Farmers' Cooperative in Frogmore, South Carolina. SCDF's executive vice president Marvin Beaulieu notes that loans are granted for a maximum of $500,000. In its 13-year history, SCDF has approved more than $13 million in loans.

But SCDF is having increasing money worries, since almost 40 percent of its revenues had come from federal Community Service Administration (CSA) grants. The Reagan administration abolished CSA, so SCDF has had to look elsewhere. The Emergency Black Survival Fund has been set up, with money raised through direct mail.

The umbrella group has also taken on a subsidiary called the Ceres Corporation, a vegetable farm in Myakka City, Florida. Currently, some 180 acres of tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, bell peppers, cauliflower, eggplant, and jalapeno peppers are in production. The farmers there are keeping bees to pollinate plants for increased production, and they recycle farm water. Eventually Ceres hopes to develop its own packing and processing plants and market its own products, independent of area packing houses. All land improvements are geared toward the original plan for the land. When funds are available, the farm will be converted to a group of small farms housing resident families, working as an agricultural community.

People's Enterprises, the Southern Consumer Educational Foundation, *Southern Consumer Times*, the Southern Cooperative Development Fund: all of these spring from the same root principles as does the Acadian Delight Bakery. In each case, people are getting jobs, plus something more: control over their own lives. Laura Rivera, once general manager and now a baker at Acadian Delight, is a firm believer in the co-op concept. "I think this is a good thing. I bought shares when I first came. I knew it keeps jobs and money in the community." □

*Helen Cordes is a free-lance writer who lives in Baton Rouge.*

## A VENTURE INTO NEW RIVER TRADING CO-OP

*The New River Trading Cooperative (NRTC), now housed in a bright, spacious six-room house in Hinton, West Virginia, began like many storefront co-ops as a pre-order food buying club. The 10 people who gathered around a kitchen table in 1974 to assemble a bulk order had found that by pooling their money, they could meet the $200 minimum required to purchase natural foods at wholesale prices.*

*As representatives of the post-'60s generation of young people seeking alternatives to a technological society, they also shared common interests in gardening, raising animals, preserving, baking, brewing, and the other homely skills characteristic of rural life but declining or nonexistent in the urban and suburban areas where they grew up. Ironically, a return to the simple life could be an expensive proposition since processed and chemically treated foods are more readily available than natural and organically grown products. Buying food collectively has become one way to beat that paradox.*

*Summers County, in southeastern West Virginia, is rural but not commercially agricultural because of the mountainous terrain. The population of about 15,000 is spread out on hilltops and in valleys along unpaved roads. During the 1940s, '50s, and '60s the population declined as work in the coal and railroad industries grew scarce, and people moved to the industrial areas of the East and Midwest. The last 15 years have seen the return of native mountaineers and the arrival of newcomers from cities and suburbs.*

# GOOD FOOD

## BY LARRY LEVINE

*Most NRTC members are among the latter. Hailing from the East Coast and Midwest, they began coming in the early 1970s to enjoy and learn about the Southern Appalachians and live a rural life. The majority are white and between the ages of 20 and 40.*

*The organization currently has 25 member households. Larry Levine, a founding member and current treasurer, describes their evolution from food buying club to storefront cooperative. It is a story that is repeated throughout the South as consumer cooperatives attempt to address the day-to-day struggle for survival while learning to make collective decisions, evaluate progress, and determine when and how to make changes.*

By the second year of our cooperative effort we were buying too much food each quarter for one home to hold comfortably, so we rented an empty one-room school that we shared with a cooperative free school playgroup. Its sturdy oak floor, wood stove, one-acre yard, and isolated location made it a fine setting for square dances, volleyball games, and costume parties which we held for fun and funds.

We soon developed an order form listing about 60 items and a newsletter to keep in touch with our members, many of whom lived far out in the country. We also began to purchase extra food to sell on pickup day, when members would assemble at the site to sort out more than a ton of food.

In spite of the site's good features, access for the delivery truck was a continuous problem, and we decided to relocate. We chose the county seat in Hinton, a town of about 4,500. We rented a small room in the middle of the Wizard Waxworks, a local handmade candle workshop right next to the railroad tracks. The central location made it easier for the trucks to make their deliveries and we had enough space to store and package our purchases, even though the environment for repackaging food was not ideal. We maintained a random inventory at this storeback operation and the job of handling all the paperwork fell to one willing co-op member. We continued our quarterly mass pre-ordering, and pushed back the wicks and paraffin to make room for food.

photo by Larry Levine

**SUE THOMPSON AND BABY SCAN THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE NRTC ENTRANCE HALLWAY.**

During 1979, we held a number of meetings to discuss the future of the co-op. We wanted to do more than save money on food purchases; we wanted to actually implement cooperative principles in operating our developing business. We wanted all members to be equally involved in the ownership, control, and maintenance of the co-op. This meant that the work had to be more evenly distributed and most members needed to take a more active role in decision-making, which we tried to do by consensus. This process was designed to elicit more commitment, air more opinions, and ultimately bring about a better decision. Consensus can take a long time but it is necessary to a cooperative venture.

After many meetings, we decided to reorganize as a state-chartered, nonprofit, non-stock cooperative, named ourselves the New River Trading Cooperative, Ltd., and received a charter to "provide nutritional, cooperative, and social opportunities and to promote cooperative alternatives." We also decided to open a store in Hinton that would be open to the public. Then we had to get by a local USDA official who had been resistant to NRTC's accepting food stamps. There have been changes in food stamp regulations since then that make it easier for food buying clubs to get authorization. But we had to suffer through more than 40 exchanges of correspondence with state, regional, and national officials in West Virginia, Philadelphia, and Washington before we got the go-ahead.

The decision to go public was a big step for us. We had to invest more of our resources of time, work, and capital, which were all limited. We also had to give up some of our privacy. But we had decided that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. With a central location we gained convenient access, more space and product variety, greater community interaction, and expanded opportunities for information and social exchange among members. Many of our members still live far back in the hills without phones or cars, so sharing a base in town was a welcome addition.

**CUSTOMERS SERVE THEMSELVES FROM THE BULK BINS & COOLER.**

*photo by Larry Levine*

NRTC opened for business on September 1, 1979, in a small low-rent building in an alley just a block from downtown. Operating three or four part-days per week, the co-op expanded its membership and made some sales to the public, nearly doubling its gross sales in a year. A low-ceilinged room about 16 feet square served as the store. Two extra back rooms were used for packing and storage. With most of the floor space devoted to bulk bins and buckets, more than three people constituted a crowd. Natural light was scarce and there wasn't enough space for children or for the social interaction that we all considered important. But we survived these difficulties and in the process members learned how to run a store.

At the beginning of our fourth year, we took a survey of the membership and decided to move again. Two of our members purchased property nearby and we leased from them the ground floor of a high-ceilinged, turn-of-the-century house. At the new location, we've been able to expand our activities and services to the membership and the larger community. We've placed a large, categorized bulletin board in the entrance hall where customers can survey announcements, schedules, recipes, and other information.

There's now ample space for activities beyond the actual food market, including a large room for children stocked with toys, supplies, a crib, and a free clothing exchange. The kitchen is a regular gathering place for sharing tea and talk and holding cooking classes and committee meetings. The backyard picnic table is equally popular in good weather. The center is large enough to share with a county home-schooling group and a birth preparedness instructor. These activities all reflect the interests and philosophy of the membership and encourage community participation

by allowing us to offer ongoing educational services.

Our location on Hinton's main street helps promote public exposure and sales. Annual sales for 1982 reached $13,500. We estimate that sales at our new location will increase by at least 10 percent. There are four or five other small markets in town, one independent supermarket, and one chain supermarket. But many of the products we offer are not generally found there and our prices on such common items as grains and beans compare favorably with those of all the stores.

The store operates on a 20-hour week and stocks more than 250 items. We buy and sell most foods in bulk so the purchaser can choose any quantity desired, but we pre-package items like liquids, spreads, and cheeses in our fully equipped late-'50s style kitchen. We stock primarily natural, whole foods, organically grown when available at reasonable cost. We have also offered garden and beekeeping supplies, plants, books, and other items. We avoid perishable produce because gardening is so popular, and there is a tailgate farmers' market nearby that we don't want to compete with.

Posted prices are 40 percent above cost except for items produced by members, which the co-op encourages by adding only a 10 percent markup. We also support other cooperatively owned and collectively operated businesses by setting lower prices for their products. For example, the members of the co-op agreed to allow a price differential support program favoring Mountain Warehouse, the cooperative distributor operated by the Appalantic co-op federation. And a vast selection of herbs, teas, spices, toiletries, and related items are shipped in from Frontier Cooperative Herbs in Iowa.

We encourage members to work in the co-op by offering a 16 percent discount. To get it, each household must clerk two hours per month per adult in the household. A clerk's duties include stocking, packaging, checkout, cleaning, and whatever else comes up since, once trained, only one person works at a time. An 8 percent discount is allowed at the checkout counter to senior citizens, travelers who belong to other co-ops, members who have missed work, and people who've been designated as "friends" of the co-op.

Natural foods marketing has grown over the past 20 years from a network of small stores into a big business that is attracting the interest of supermarket chains. Even the convenience and discount chains like 7-Eleven and K-Mart are experimenting with the profit possibilities of natural food merchandising. Paralleling this is the phenomenal growth of co-ops themselves. The Co-op Directory grew from 2,500 to 10,000 listings in a single year, and in 1980 national co-op membership was estimated at 3.5 million people. Co-ops have reached out from urban student centers to small cities, from town to country dwellers, and now there are federations, warehouses, and natural product lines. A small co-op like ours does not have the financial resources of these newcomers. But if we focus on our strengths and continually seek to resolve difficulties, we can hope to take what we can use from this boom and our members can continue to realize satisfaction and enrichment through participation in the New River Trading Co-op. □

**NRTC OCCUPIES THE GROUND FLOOR OF THIS TURN-OF-THE CENTURY HOUSE IN HINTON.**

*photo by Larry Levine*

# A VENTURE INTO SHRIMP
# HILTON HEAD ISLAND FISHING CO-OP

BY VERNIE SINGLETON

Catching food from the sea has always been integral to black life on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. After the Civil War, blacks sought self-sufficiency through crabbing, shrimping, fishing, oystering, and farming, taking their catch and produce to the Savannah docks by sailboat to be sold.

Today that life is largely a thing of the past; most residents depend on the resort industry for their livelihood and fish only for personal consumption. But one group of black islanders continues the tradition of shrimping and, since 1968, has eked out a living by pooling resources in the Hilton Head Island Fishing Cooperative. The shrimpers' success has ebbed and flowed with their catch, and there are many stories to be told and lessons to be learned from their experiences.

Thinking it was time for black shrimpers to own a dock of their own, Hilton Head native Freddie Chisolm initiated the call for the co-op in the mid-'60s. The black shrimpers faced discrimination in unloading and selling their catch at the existing docks and had the lowest purchasing priority for the fuel and ice essential to their trade. As often as not they were barred from repairs of their boats and nets on the white-owned docks. And, most importantly, the market price they were offered for their shrimp was lower than what the white shrimpers got.

Chisolm called together a group of 12 men who shared these grievances against white dock owners. Although not all were boat owners, all committed themselves to developing a black-owned and -operated enterprise that would get them a fair price for their shrimp as well as provide the means for maintaining their trawlers.

After almost a year of meeting together to discuss how best to go about starting the co-op, each member agreed to contribute $500 and 15 percent of his catch. They used this pool of money to pay for docking space, net repairs, fuel, and ice. One of their number had some experience with fund-raising, and under his guidance they wrote proposals and grant applications. An Office of Economic Opportunity feasibility study led to a loan from the Farmers Home Administration for $66,290. Other money came from the Ford Foundation and the Lutheran Church.

With this seed money, the group opened up a fishing cooperative along Pope Road on the north shore of the island. Relying solely on shrimp, the co-op was quite successful in the early years when shrimp were plentiful. Membership grew to 16, and in 1975 20 boats were regularly serviced at the co-op's dock, some of which belonged to non-members who docked with co-op permission. Relations between black and white shrimpers improved, and some white shrimpers regularly unloaded at the co-op dock.

**SHRIMPER WORKS WITH FISHNETS IN SOUTH CAROLINA WATERS.**

*photo © 1983 by Reesa Tansey*

In the early '70s the co-op attracted a lot of attention – not for its shrimping success, but for its strong stand on an environmental issue. Local estuaries were threatened by the plans of BASF, a German-owned chemical corporation, to locate a plant at Victoria Bluff not far from Hilton Head. The shrimpers gathered 45,000 signatures protesting the plan and took the *Captain Dave*, a local trawler, to Washington to hand-deliver the petition to the Secretary of the Interior. This act was crucial in keeping the plant out of the area, and the publicity brought people from as far away as China to learn about the co-op and how it worked.

But this success did not help the co-op resolve its most pressing problems: undercapitalization and the need for better management.

"We had some bad years," says David Jones, who was the co-op's founding president. "For about three years there weren't any shrimp to catch." Jones had to sell one of his boats in 1977 and the other in 1979, when shrimp were too scarce and the cost of fuel too high for him to continue shrimping. The best year was 1976 when the co-op's 234,795 pounds of shrimp sold for $481,247. The worst year, by contrast, was 1981, when the catch dropped to 51,615 pounds, which sold for $160,011. The catch was up again in 1982 – to 91,090 pounds – but the bad years predominated. Poor record-keeping and some misuse of funds meant the co-op lost money in the bad years. Members sometimes defaulted on their loans from the co-op, and the business went in debt for supplies shrimpers bought but failed to pay for on schedule.

Today the co-op still owns the facilities, but the members have relinquished control over managerial decisions and operations by leasing them to a former co-op vice president. Even if survival is not in the cards, though, the Hilton Head co-op served its members well for a time – and served also as a subject for study and an inspiration to other cooperative ventures at home and abroad.

Former president Jones blames members' lack of management skills for the failure to cope with the hardships of bad years. But he also says: "It depends on working together. That's the co-op as a whole – working together. When we first started out, we were working very close together. As the years went on we started getting this division among the members. When you start getting those divisions you began to get bad attitudes. Then the business began to fail. So that's why I say work hard and work together." □

*Vernie Singleton is a free-lance writer and a native of Hilton Head Island.*

*photo © 1983 by Reesa Tansey*

**COOPERATIVELY OWNED SHRIMP DOCK ON HILTON HEAD ISLAND.**

# THE GOLDEN PINE CONE

BY CHARLES BLACKBURN, JR.

Goody Koonce grew a little tobacco, raised several hogs and a few chickens, made a little whiskey, and when he got thirsty he took a little drink. He lived by himself in a clapboard house under the branches of an oak that held a cloud of leaves in summer and dropped acorns on his tin roof in the fall. His intellect was as clear as the water from his well, unmuddied by higher education. When apples fell from the tree near the old barn, he thought not of Sir Isaac Newton, but of hard cider and good times.

He had a gold-plated pocket watch he'd won in a poker game, a hound named Sam, his father's looks, and his mother's sense. He was neither young enough to be fooled by Republicans, nor old enough to recall the sinking of the Titanic. Once he rode the train as far as Richmond, where he got lost among heathens. Ten-thirty usually saw him in bed – sometimes he slept in his clothes. In the winter he let his whiskers grow. No one told him not to. Still he longed for love and riches.

Goody Koonce was hunting late one afternoon when he spied a fat possum hanging upside down, asleep, from the limb of a tall pine tree. As he raised his gun and took a bead, one of the last rays of the sun flashed on an object at the foot of the tree. Goody Koonce lowered his weapon. There beneath the tree was a golden pine cone big as a pumpkin.

He went over and hefted it. There was no doubt that it was solid gold because it was exceedingly heavy.

"What a rare thang," said Goody Koonce.

His words aroused the napping possum who opened one eye and spoke with cranky annoyance.

"Throw the pine cone in the pig parlor and your wealth will increase," he said, shutting his eye again.

Goody Koonce stared at the possum with open mouth. "What a rare thang," said he, thinking to capture the possum and use him to hawk snake oil on the county fair circuit. But before he could act on this plan, the possum changed into an owl and flew away.

"It's rare, I tell you," Goody Koonce told his hound Sam, who did not dispute the matter.

He hugged the pine cone greedily, fearful that it too might change shape and abandon him. But it remained: immutable, golden. It was worth at least thirty thousand dollars, he opined. He could put it in the bank and spend it a scale at a time and live happily for many years. On the other hand, he reasoned, if his wealth should be increased as the possum foretold, he could live happily forever.

Goody Koonce went straightaway to the pig parlor. It was getting pretty dark by now and the sow was snoring. He hurled the pine cone like a shot-putter. It landed with a splat in the mud. Then he reached toward the sky and waited for the stars to fall as diamonds into his arms. But no sooner had the golden pine cone mired down than the sow awoke, scrambled over to it and gobbled it up.

Goody Koonce wept and howled in anguish. After he had exhausted his grief, the sow said in a velvet voice: "If you let me share your bed this night, I'll turn into a beautiful heiress."

By now Goody Koonce was growing skeptical. "How much will you be worth?" he demanded, sniffling.

"Millions," said the sow.

This cheered him somewhat.

They walked up to the house and, after a light supper, settled into bed. The sow took up all the room and Goody Koonce was forced to lie in its embrace to keep from falling on the floor.

"You must take a solemn oath never to eat barbecue again if the spell is to work," said the sow.

"Anything," said Goody Koonce with a clothespin on his nose, for the sow smelled rather gamey.

"And you must kiss me good night," said the sow, almost as an afterthought.

Goody Koonce turned his head, kissed the tip of the sow's ear, and turned off the lamp. He hardly got any sleep because of the sow's snoring. Finally, however, he drifted off, and when he woke at first light, the magic had been done.

The sow had turned into a beautiful woman with long black hair and eyes that sparkled like moonbeams. She had wrapped herself in a sheet, having no clothes.

"Come," she said, calling him from bed. "We'll be late."

Although her body had changed, her voice was the same velvet voice of the sow, and Goody Koonce could not help remembering the way she had looked the night before. Nevertheless, he shook it from his mind and followed.

Outside, a limousine was waiting. They drove for many miles and turned down a clay road he had never seen before. For three days they bumped down the washboard road past miles and miles of green tobacco. One afternoon over tea in the back seat, with cup and saucer rattling on his knee, Goody Koonce inquired of his paramour: "Do you think we'll be getting there soon?"

"It won't be long now," she smiled, handing him a crumpet. He popped it into his mouth. "Hmph, cold beer and a hush puppy would be more like it," he groused to himself. Then he met her loving gaze, and nothing else seemed to matter.

At dawn the next day they came over a hill in time to see the sun rising over a city on the green plain. As they approached, however, Goody Koonce saw that it wasn't a city but a mammoth palace made of blood-red stone and girded by ten thousand ebony columns. 'Twas not the sun he saw above it, but an enormous golden dome that rivaled the radiance of that star.

The car had barely come to a stop in front of the palace when its massive doors opened and out swarmed a thousand porters wearing turbans, who picked up the limousine and carried it into the front hall. Then, bowing and muttering salutations until their many voices were like the din of a mighty river, the porters scattered and vanished like a mist.

Goody Koonce sent a cold glance after them, remarking to himself: "Hmph, ragheads in the big house!" The vast hall, made of polished Italian marble, was as cool as a cellar. Clouds near the ceiling threatened rain.

"We'd better go in here," said the beauty, moving into the library. The shelves of books ran as far as the eye could see. The musty, unwholesome air of learning made him sneeze. "Wait here," said his love as she left the room.

Goody Koonce sat and fingered the brocade on the arm of the chair, gazing about with wonder. Hardly had the door closed and his fair lady gone than it opened again and she returned with the sad news.

"Daddy has died and left me his fortune," she said.

"I didn't know he was sick," sympathized Goody Koonce.

They had a grand funeral. All the heads of state were there.

And they lived happily for hundreds of years, aging not a day. For the first two hundred years of his reign, Lord Koonce did nothing but read. He read every book in the library and knew everything. Thereafter, his days were devoted to world affairs. Presidents and kings came to him for counsel, and thanks to his guidance, hunger and war were swept from the globe.

Each year on the anniversary of his enchantment palace artisans brought to the Lord Koonce an exquisitely wrought golden pine cone in tribute to his magnificence. They were delicate, intricately designed objects. Some glittered with diamonds, while others shone with rubies and emeralds. The one he prized the most was but two millimeters long. He studied it for hours under an immense magnifying glass. Every scale was perfect.

Evenings were spent at parcheesi and backgammon, with occasional brisk games of whist. One evening, while they were at the gaming table, the servant Umslopogaas entered the chamber.

Umslopogaas was a tall, fierce Masai who always carried a spear and an elliptical shield of buffalo hide, on which heraldic devices from his native land were painted. He wore a large cape of hawk feathers. An oval headdress of ostrich feathers framed his noble face. On his ankles he wore hairy garters, and on his calves were spurs from which dangled long tufts of black, waving hair from the Colobus monkey.

Lord Koonce disliked Umslopogaas because he was a fearless kibitzer, but he respected the Masai

for the power of his dreams. Whist was the game on this particular night, and Lord Koonce hid his cards before bidding Umslopogaas to come closer. Umslopogaas approached and spoke in his native tongue, knowing no other.

"O Lord Koonce, Great One, Mighty One, Whose Wisdom Eats Up the Darkness and Whose Goodness is a Balm to the Earth, Beloved of His People and Feared by His Enemies, Lord from Generation to Generation, I come to you with a dream, a terrible dream that visited me last night while the land lay sleeping and evildoers roamed."

Lord Koonce, who spoke the language fluently, responded.

"Tell me, Umslopogaas the Proud One, the Brave, Warrior Whose Spear is Like the Lightning from Whose Anger No Man Recovers, lay bare your heart to me that I too may see this vision."

"It is an omen," said the warrior. "It is a portent, O Mighty One, Whose Eyes are Twin Suns Casting a Light from Which No Man Can Find Shade. This dream was an evil dream, a wicked and perfidious dream, planted in my head by demons who have no home."

"Say on, Umslopogaas, and know ye that, unlike the eland who told the lion of its hunger, your news shall not get thee eaten."

The warrior assumed a grave face and rattled his spear on his shield, saying: "O He Who Chats With The Gods, it is ominous that ye recall the eland's fate, for it is of this that I dreamed, and the eland's fate was your own."

The countenance of Lord Koonce grew very pale, for the dreams of Umslopogaas were powerful dreams.

"What can it be? In what evil abode was this vision born? How came it here across the stars and deeps of night? Say on, Umslopogaas."


*illustrations by Beth Epstein*

"The spirits who dwell in the mountain yet call not the mountain home, these were the spirits who bore me this dream. I was without strength to repel them, made weak by their magic. My soul called for shield and spear, but my body answered not."

"Say on, say on."

"It was this that I saw, O Intrepid One," said Umslopogaas. "Within a vast kraal I saw thee chased and hunted, and no man there could help thee, though there were many. The magic was thick in the air, and none could overcome it. It was the work of the Evil Ones. In this dream ye were eaten by hogs, O Ruler of the Universe."

"Hogs?"

"Hogs."

It was a terrible dream, indeed. And in contemplation of it, Lord Koonce momentarily exposed his cards to the wily African, who said: "Forgive your unworthy ser-

vant, Whom the Spirits Choose As Their Messenger. Forgive him this dream and play the little spade."

So saying, he departed. But it was not for kibitzing alone that the warrior had come, and the memory of his dream lingered long after the game had been lost.

In fact, soon after the revelation of this peculiar dream the Lord Koonce grew most uneasy. For centuries at every meal his tongue had been treated to a carnival of culinary delights. He ate marinated herring filets, braised loin of veal Cordon Bleu, avocados piquante, stuffed mussels, chicken Kiev, South African lobster tails with orange butter sauce, oxtail consomme, filet mignon, Egyptian lamb, blini with caviar, caneton roti Madagascar with a sauce poivrade, salmon in aspic, baked eggs Savoyarde, bouillabaisse, broiled scampi, duchesse potatoes and hot ratatouille, brioche de foie gras, cinnamon cake, orange Bavarois, stuffed plantains with Haitian hot sauce, zucchini and carrot julienne, sea bass marechiaro, daube glace, chicken in champagne, miroton de boeuf, oysters Rockefeller, calamari all Luciana, pompano en papillote, and cheesecake.

But in spite of these succulent offerings, each prepared by a chef whose specialty it was, Lord Koonce retained a hoggish craving. To the length and breadth of his being, to the pit of his stomach and the depths of his soul, Lord Koonce desired barbecue. Yet he knew that the moment it touched his lips, the spell would be broken and his love and riches would fade. Although his baubles gave him great pleasure and his wife was an immense comfort, Lord Koonce did not think he could contain himself much longer.

When he first felt this urge coming over him, he instructed the six thousand four hundred and some odd servants to refrain from mentioning the word "barbecue" in his presence and to abstain from consuming it themselves. But it proved too cruel a command. Late at night as he roamed the halls he would oft detect the faint fragrance of cooked pork on the breeze.

Lord Koonce was much vexed and annoyed. He commanded spies to inform on those responsible; but alas, his informants were riddled with human frailty. One after another, they reported to him with hot sauce on their breaths. His nose had gotten so keen that no amount of tooth brushing or mouth washing could conceal the deed. As they came, so were they executed on the dawning of the next day.

In the small hours of the night, as he sallied forth through the palace, too restless for sleep, Lord Koonce was met

at every turning by the devilishly sweet smell of roast pork. Fearing a revolution in the works, he bolted himself in his bedchamber. Even as he lay on his two-acre bed wrapped in his ermine robes, there came to him muffled peals of laughter, laughter that reverberated through every room in the palace, spawned, he knew, at some clandestine orgy of pig-picking.

Then, one morning at breakfast, his tolerance for mutiny was utterly exhausted. Everything he ate tasted faintly of pork – flavored thus, no doubt, by his hirelings in order to unbalance him! He lined up the kitchen staff of three hundred and forty some odd, marched them out onto the back porch, and slammed the screen door behind them. They were beheaded before his wife returned from shopping. The ceremonies didn't stain the stone, it being already red.

"It is quiet in the kitchen tonight, milord," remarked Lady Koonce that evening, taking a sip of very old port.

"Quite," replied Lord Koonce.

Having no cooks, they lived on tea and soda crackers for a time. Lord Koonce proclaimed it "health food," and even though everyone was perpetually ravenous, they thought it healthy to hold their tongues and retain custody of their heads.

Finally, a new kitchen staff was acquired. The head chefs from the world's most renowned restaurants were kidnapped, and all the nations, after accusing one another, formed alliances and waged war, plunging the world into chaos. The papers were full of it for months.

So it was that on the eve of their five-hundredth anniversary, Lord Koonce and his lady dined in regal splendor as prelude to the Royal Operatic Company's performance of *The Dragoons of Villars*. Yet as he listened to his wife's velvet voice, Lord Koonce pictured in his mind the sow he had taken to bed that dark night five centuries before. He smiled absently at her, pretending to be intrigued by her conversation, but in his mind he was roasting her in a pit and ladling on the sauce.

Halfway through the meal he sprang up and chased her round the table with knife and fork in hand and a monstrous gleam in his eye; had the musicians (who were tuning up) not clubbed him with their cellos, he surely would have eaten her. They confined him to the cellar, sensing that he was mad, and divided his lands and chattels amongst them.

Thus was the Lord Koonce deposed. Sad is the telling of it, but sadder still the living.

He roamed the catacombs beneath the palace for six generations, singing bawdy songs and rattling pieces of iron. In the house above, parents used him to discipline their children, saying:

Have a care
How you stare
At the warts
On people's noses,
Or that feller
In the cellar
Will beat you
With rubber hoses.

Then one day, as luck would have it, Koonce the Fallen, Koonce the Downtrodden, Koonce the Misunderstood discovered the warm remains of a pig-picking which he set upon with bestial moans of delight.

No sooner had he taken that first bite than the walls around him dissolved and he found himself in the forest once more before the tree where he had claimed the golden pine cone. A check of his pocket watch showed that only five minutes had elapsed. There was the possum, hanging upside down, asleep.

"You cheated me," complained Goody Koonce.

The possum opened first one eye, then the other, yawned, and said:

"Sucker."

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# Workers of the Harvest

BY L.A. WINOKUR AND CHIP HUGHES

## Shape-Up

The Florida sun had not yet risen, as we sleepily made our way past the endless miles of sugar plantations and cane fields. It was 4:30 a.m. on a cold January day. The nearby towns along the shore of Lake Okeechobee still seemed blanketed in sleep, unconscious of pre-dawn stirrings.

Under the cover of night, dusty white vans and tattered old school buses hurried through the quiet darkness. Huddled groups of bundled bodies wearily shuffled along the side of the road, like co-conspirators in some prearranged plan. As we sped by in our rented station wagon, we knew we were nearing Belle Glade, Florida, the home base of the Eastern farmworker stream.

This was to be our last day in Florida, after a week visiting farmworker groups up and down the state. Seven of us, three blacks and four whites, representing various churches and farmworker groups in North Carolina, had journeyed south to learn more about the home base of the estimated 40,000 workers who migrate north each harvest season to our state. Before leaving Florida, we decided to witness the Belle Glade "shape-up," the early morning recruitment of day workers by farm labor contractors. Jobs go to those who will take the least pay for the "privilege" of doing back-breaking labor under the steamy Florida sun.

What we saw and heard during the next several hours left us all with lingering, disturbing impressions. One of us referred to this daily recruitment ritual as a "conspiracy of darkness." To another, it was the "open buying and selling of human beings in a slave market."

Hundreds upon hundreds of people of color – women, men, young, old, black-American, Hispanic, and Haitian – gathered at the town square. The labor contractors they met wanted only enough workers to fill the vacant seats in the vans and buses. Many workers secured another day's employment; many more were not so lucky.

All are players in this game of chance. The stakes are high and immediate – day-to-day survival. Of those left standing in the square, some passed it off with comments like, "I didn't want to work today anyway." Somehow, though, we knew they would be back tomorrow – and the next day, and the one after. Even the sick, the injured, and the elderly would return despite the daily disap-

*photo by Joe Morris*

pointment. Not a one could afford to give up the chance of one day's work.

By the time the first shafts of sunlight spread across the square, the marketers of human flesh had vanished. Their vans and buses creaked wearily toward the fields, as if sympathetic to the silent resignation of the passengers inside. Not until much later that evening, after the blistering sun had retired, would these workers return to their homes, only to rest up for the following morning when the ritual of trade in human labor would be repeated.

In the meantime, the rest of the country would wake up and go about its business, enjoying the fruits of farm labor at each meal, oblivious to the slave-like conditions of the harvest.

## People in the System

Who are these workers huddled in the early morning darkness of Belle Glade? They are some of the more than five million agricultural workers in this country who form an invisible, ever-mobile work force. They are some of the 1.5 million workers who yearly labor on farms in the Eastern migrant stream. They are also part of the agricultural work force of the South, whose 13 states account for 50 percent of the nation's agricultural labor pool. California has the most, but the Southern states of Texas (second), North Carolina (third), Florida (fourth), and Georgia (sixth) account for an enormous percentage of the farm work force. The pattern of small black farms and of large white farms which hire mainly local or migrating black farmworkers still persists in the South. Both the Western and Midwestern migrant streams are dominated by Hispanic farmworkers, but more than 60 percent of the Eastern stream's workers are black.

For migrant workers in Belle Glade's morning market, the trip up the coast begins in the early spring, after the winter citrus and vegetable crops are harvested in Florida. The trip up the migrant stream is not an unplanned flow. Federally licensed farm labor contractors recruit crews usually numbering 25 to 30 workers. Most crews have work laid out for them in advance, averaging two to four stops over a six- or eight-month period. One crew may pick peaches in Georgia and South Carolina, and then jump to New Jersey to pick apples; another may go directly to North Carolina, moving from fields of green peppers to cucumbers to sweet potatoes before returning to Florida.

Many of the crewleaders, both "freewheelers" and those placed with growers under the aegis of the federal employment service, continue to work year after year with the same growers and farming corporations. Growers carefully limit their legal responsibility for the workers in their fields by "contracting" with these "independent" crew bosses to deliver a certain level of production at the end of a day or week. How the crewleader gets results is his problem.

The grower may own the barracks where workers sleep, and be required by law to pay a production rate equivalent to the federal minimum wage of $3.35 per hour; but he will also claim that what happens inside the labor camp, and what an individual worker receives as *net* pay after deductions by the crewleader, are "none of my business." It's a system that attracts the ruthless, breeds corruption, and thrives on disunity among workers.

While the growers in this system are virtually all white, crewleaders are generally of the same race as their crews. The various ethnic and geographic groups of workers are routinely pitted against each other to keep fear of job loss high and wages low. Southern agriculture now relies on a hodgepodge of laborers to plant and harvest its bounty: Hispanic, black, and white migrants; local "seasonal help," primarily blacks; legally imported Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and Haitians; and illegal aliens, mainly from Mexico.

As we will see, the federal government is intimately involved in this unique system of labor-management relations by acts of both omission and commission. By not even collecting the data necessary to expose how the system works, the government effectively thwarts new policy initiatives that could attack the exploitation of farmworkers at its roots. But the statistics that do exist offer a startling picture of the effects of this "conspiracy of darkness" on five million human beings:

- Life expectancy of the average U.S. farmworker is 49 years, compared to 73 years for the population as a whole.
- Median family income for a migrant family of six – often with children working – is $3,900 per year – less than half of the official family poverty level of $9,287 and *less than one-fifth* the average family income of $22,388.
- 86 percent of migrant children fail to complete high school, while only 25 percent of all U.S. children drop out.
- Farm work is extremely hazardous, with the third highest death and serious injury rate of all occupations; farmworker families face a disability rate that is three times the national average.
- Of the estimated 10,000 migrant labor camps in the nation, only a few can meet basic federal safety and health standards.

Whether they sleep in boarding

*photo by Philip van Buren*

**FARMWORKERS GENERALLY LIVE IN DEPLORABLY CROWDED, UNSANITARY QUARTERS.**

houses in town or in isolated labor camps in the middle of nowhere, farmworkers generally live in deplorably crowded, unsanitary quarters where communicable diseases run rampant. It is not uncommon for 40 people to share one or two pit latrine outhouses, outdoor slop sinks, and showers. Occasionally, a camp will have no sanitary facilities at all.

Although they pick the food which nourishes the rest of us, many farmworkers are fed barely enough to sustain themselves. The day's meals typically consist of a plate of grits for breakfast, bologna on white bread for lunch, and chicken necks or fatback with rice and greens for dinner. Exorbitant food costs, running $40 to $45 a week, are deducted from each worker's pay. The available beverages are usually alcoholic; beer and wine are illegally resold in the camps for two and three times the usual cost – another tool for keeping workers in debt and under control. Access to food stamps is also dependent on the crewleaders, and in most cases any benefit derived from their use does not go to the workers.

Working conditions in the fields are no better than living conditions in the camps. Farmworkers are frequently exposed to dangerous pesticides in the form of chemical residues on the crops or drift from the spraying of adjacent fields; sometimes farmworkers are directly sprayed in the fields and in the camps. Many times the pesticide residue run-off contaminates nearby drinking water supplies.

In most fields of the South and the East Coast, there are no toilets for workers to use during dawn-to-dusk workdays. Clean, cool drinking water and handwashing facilities are seldom available. In addition to the highly communicable diseases like tuberculosis which breed in close, unsanitary living quarters, the work itself is often physically debilitating and rapidly takes its toll on workers' bodies.

Access to health care is severely limited for workers who must rely on their crewleaders for a ride to a clinic. As with everything in a migrant labor camp, there is always a steep charge for transportation. Moreover, visits to a clinic require that workers take time off from work. And since workers must often meet a production quota before they are fed, the loss of a day's pay can also mean going without food.

Why do workers tolerate such living and working conditions? One principal reason is that once inside the system, they can't escape because they immediately find themselves in perpetual debt to the crew boss, beginning with a stiff fee for the transportation to their first job. The alleged costs of all food, lodging, alcohol, drugs, and other services are always deducted from a farmworker's weekly pay, often resulting in a "balance due."

Once in debt, workers are told they cannot leave the camp until their debt is paid in full. Yet the longer they stay, the deeper they fall in debt. Nightly dog patrols, as well as threats, violence, and intimidation by the crewleaders and their henchmen, keep people from "escaping."

Federal law says a condition of peonage or involuntary servitude exists when workers are prevented from leaving the labor camps by threats or acts of violence for real or imagined debts. For thousands of workers in the South, and up the Eastern stream, peonage is a daily reality, as several slavery trials in the last few years have graphically demonstrated. Workers can be caught in this psychological and physical form of slavery until the day they die. For some, the experience of labor camp life is so dehumanizing and radicalizing that they take great risks to escape. For others who vow to get out, the system is too strong, the alternatives too elusive, and the support from public or private agencies too tenuous to make freedom a realistic possibility.

## Uncle Sam as Crew Boss

Large pools of unorganized low-wage farm laborers continue to be available to growers because of federal government policies that have evolved over the last 50 years. Despite the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment – which abolished slavery, peonage, and involuntary servitude – federal programs today are designed to protect the labor needs and profits of large growers, rather than the welfare of farmworkers. That bias is the essential key to understanding the modern farm labor procurement system.

As early as 1901, the U.S. Industrial Commission noted the importance of migrant workers to U.S. agriculture by reporting that "colored labor from the South was being used in New England states and that migration from crop to crop and area to area was an established pattern involving thousands of workers." During the 1920s, winter vegetable and sugar cane

*photo by Joe Morris*

growing areas were developed in Florida, making the state a focal point for off-season migration of workers from neighboring states.

Workers displaced by farm bankruptcies, bad crops, and machines during the Great Depression swelled the ranks of itinerant farm laborers. The cornerstone of the New Deal response, however, focused on farm income and production. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933 paid growers to plow under a portion of their cotton fields to reduce the surplus and increase prices on the remaining crops. The law said growers must pay a percentage of the government subsidies to their tenants and sharecroppers. But that part of the AAA was rarely enforced.

In 1934, H.L. Mitchell and Clay East organized the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) in Arkansas to demand their fair share of government payments to cotton growers. By organizing rank-and-file farm laborers and by generating national attention for their plight through trips to New York and Washington, the STFU increased political pressure for legislation to help the unemployed and under-employed agricultural workers.

The Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 set up a national employment service through the U.S. Department of Labor, and it soon became the main mechanism for moving farm tenants, mostly blacks, to states with agricultural labor needs. But Southern growers also wielded considerable political clout during the New Deal. In a legislative deal to win support from key Southern senators, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 specifically excluded agricultural workers. These two laws established the basic structure of workers' rights to bargain collectively and to enjoy federally mandated minimum standards for wages and working conditions. The legacy of being written out of these laws still haunts farmworkers today.

Growers also effectively turned the Wagner-Peyser Act into a system that legitimized the recruitment of migrant laborers through crew leaders. Under the Act, state employment security commissions were supposed to issue "interstate clearance orders" to growers who proved they could not find sufficient workers from their local areas and who pledged they would meet minimum standards for working conditions. As later court decisions demonstrated, these provisions of the Act quickly gave way to a system in which one state employment security commission routinely contacted another with an individual grower's labor specifications, including the names of "preferred crewleaders" and the number of workers required, length of employment, and rate of pay.

Before World War II, about 25,000 black Southern workers moved along the Eastern stream each year; that number rose to 58,000 by 1949. As the use of migrant labor increased, growers, their associations, and government officials began holding conferences on ways to control the mobile work force more efficiently. In 1944, farm supervisors from 10 Atlantic Coast state agricultural extension services met in Raleigh, North Carolina, and established the first cooperative rural manpower program. The agreement – still basic to government involvement in farm labor procurement – stipulated that the U.S. Department of Agriculture would "avoid disrupting any continuing employment relationships that had been built up between employers and crewleaders."

Meanwhile, a Western stream of migrants grew rapidly during the supposed labor shortages of World War II. Mexican nationals were imported to work in the fields under the federal "bracero" program. On paper this program required many of the same safeguards as the Wagner-Peyser Act, but in practice it confirmed all the elements of federal farmworker policy in place by 1950: keep the domestic agricultural work force unorganized and deprived of basic labor protections afforded other workers, and undercut any efforts to bargain for better conditions with the threat of importing foreign workers.

The original bracero program ended officially in 1964, but the H-2 program now administered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service still assures growers ready access to low-paid foreign workers on a temporary basis. In the Eastern stream, most of these workers are Jamaican sugar cane cutters and apple pickers. The currently pending Simpson-Mazzoli bill – the so-called Immigration Reform Bill – would expand the H-2 program significantly, posing a serious threat to thousands of domestic workers, especially those trying to follow in the path of the United Farm Workers by organizing themselves into a labor union.

## Reform and a Mass Movement

Public outrage triggered by the Thanksgiving, 1960, telecast of Edward R. Morrow's *Harvest of Shame*, bolstered by the stirrings of the Civil Rights Movement, led to tentative federal reforms. In 1963, the Farm Labor Contractors Registration Act (FLCRA) required for the first time the registration of all crewleaders. And in 1966, amendments to the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act finally gave farmworkers the protection of federal minimum wage regulations.

The registration act, however, left

*photo by Joe Morris*

**FARM LABORERS ARE SIMPLY TOO BUSY TRYING TO MEET THEIR BASIC SURVIVAL NEEDS.**

the grower – the person most able to dictate the terms of the harvest – with no responsibility for the conditions under which farmworkers labored. In 1983, FLCRA was repealed; yet in its 20-year life, the Department of Labor had still not registered the estimated 12,000 crewleaders in the nation. Those who were certified as meeting federal and state labor standards included Tony Booker, who was convicted in 1980 in the first modern slavery case, and Willie Warren, Sr., infamous in farm-labor circles as the "Black Knight." Warren was convicted of holding workers in involuntary servitude in Florida in August, 1983. He had been referred by the government employment service as a "preferred crewleader" in 1979 and '80 while he was holding slaves, and again in 1981 and '82, the year his two sons were convicted of slavery in North Carolina.

The 1960s brought other changes for farm laborers, including coverage under several federal social programs. The Migrant Health Act underwrote construction of a network of public health clinics. A migrant education program targeted funds for children caught in the stream. The Legal Services Corporation began offering legal aid to migrants. And the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) counted migrant and seasonal farmworkers among its clients for job referrals, emergency aid, and basic adult education.

The most impressive gains of the '60s and '70s came as the result of a new mass movement among the farmworkers themselves. (See accompanying article on the Florida United Farm Workers' contract.) It was this movement which instilled confidence and changed conditions for farmworkers, attracted the support of millions of Americans in a boycott of table grapes, forced the media to cover the farmworkers' story, and pressured the government into creating new programs – however weak – to address the "farm labor problem."

One thread of this movement among agricultural workers goes back to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU). In the late 1930s, STFU affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), then in 1946 received a charter from the American Federation of Labor as the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU). During the 1950s, under the direction of H.L. Mitchell, NFLU organized cane workers in Puerto Rico, fruit pickers in Florida, dairy workers in Louisiana, and sharecroppers in Arkansas. In 1960, after merging with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union, the NFLU transported over 10,000 Southern black workers to work in canneries on farms in southern New Jersey, in the only known effort by unions to compete with the traditional crewleader system in the stream.

After the merger of the AFL and the CIO in 1956, the NFLU became part of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). In 1963, the AFL-CIO committed over $500,000 for farm labor organizing, centered mainly in California. Grassroots work by AWOC during the early 1960s in California laid the basis for the emergence of the United Farm Workers Union of America (UFW), under the leadership of Cesar Chavez.

Numerous efforts to organize farmworkers were made in the South, but met with limited success. In 1965, spurrred on by the Civil Rights Movement, the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union led a strike of 3,000 cotton pickers which was smashed by the powerful growers. In North Carolina, 1,000 berry pickers began a strike for higher wages with assistance from local poverty agencies. This effort was also beaten back during the summer of 1969 by eastern North Carolina growers. A number of organizing efforts were also attempted in Florida by various unions, including the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department, but none resulted in any lasting contracts or labor organizations.

Farmworker relief and advocacy organizations with church and other support sprang up during these years, paralleling the organizing of workers. As early as 1937, the Workers Defense League launched the National Sharecroppers Fund to raise funds for the STFU. Through the National Sharecroppers Fund and the National Committee on Farm Labor, liberal church and labor supporters helped keep the farmworker issues alive through the 1950s and '60s.

Support from the Catholic Church and the labor movement for Cesar Chavez certainly escalated the farmworkers' struggle in California, which led to the first UFW contracts with grape growers in 1966. But inside Congress the farm lobby is still a formidable, well-financed opponent. The absence of a sustained "farmworker-initiated" national lobby is not surprising. Farm laborers, the majority of whom are not unionized, are simply too busy trying to meet their basic survival needs to devote the time, energy, and resources necessary to win gains through the legislative process. Advocacy groups can effectively act as a voice for farmworker concerns, but only if they are also promoting efforts by agricultural workers to organize and speak for themselves.

On a state level, the recent anti-slavery campaign in North Carolina

photo by Joe Morris

illustrates the potential support groups have for effecting legislative change today, as well as the frustration that results from working through the prescribed political channels. Reacting to 16 federal slavery convictions of migrant labor contractors operating in North Carolina from 1979 to 1982, farmworker supporters lobbied the state legislature to enact an anti-slavery statute. The proposed bill not only would have made it a felony for an individual to hold workers in involuntary servitude, but also would have made the growers liable for these acts of peonage on their property. The North Carolina Farm Bureau vigorously opposed such a measure, claiming it was an "insult" to farmers because it implied that slavery existed in the state.

After lengthy debate and six drafts of the proposed bill, the anti-slavery statute passed both houses of the legislature. However, in response to the Farm Bureau's powerful lobby, the final bill made growers responsible only for reporting known incidences of slavery to the county sheriff. Their crew bosses could be prosecuted, but the growers themselves could still plead ignorance and go free. It was a mixed victory for farmworkers and their supporters: the one-and-a-half-year struggle generated consistent media attention to the agricultural labor conditions in the state and gave state activists a new handle for attacking the migrant labor system; but farmworker supporters say the battle also diverted energy from other concerns and netted only a "token" piece of legislation. As long as the law deflects the responsibility from the growers to the crewleaders, peonage will continue, they argue.

Advocates also came away with a reinforced belief that significant changes will not occur in agriculture until farmworkers themselves come together and demand changes. Farmworker participation in the anti-slavery fight was largely limited to courageous testimony at the public hearings; but judging from the strong impact this testimony had on the press and on legislators, it is all the more imperative that farmworkers themselves initiate organizing activities.

Support groups can also play an important role in the struggle of farmworkers by educating the public, directly and through the media, about the system in which migrant laborers must live and work. Too many Americans view farmworkers not as human beings, but as farm implements: "hands," or "two-legged animals," or so many "head" working in the field. Or they are seen only as helpless victims. As their successful organizing attests, farmworkers are people who can "help themselves" and take control of their own lives. Educational efforts through churches, schools, and community groups can confront these prejudices and misconceptions, and at the same time can encourage more local participation in farmworker issues.

An effective method for organizing community support is the consumer boycott. By taking specific actions in the marketplace, consumers can support farmworkers who are already organizing on their own behalf. They can also express their support in an activity which farmworkers have determined is necessary. Currently, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in Ohio is promoting a national boycott of all Campbell Soup and Campbell-owned products, including its Pepperidge Farm subsidiary; and the United Farm Workers in California are continuing their boycott of Red Coach lettuce. By participating in these efforts, supporters also indirectly pave the way for future activities among farmworkers in other regions.

Finally, there is a strong need for advocacy groups to link up and share information. Workers in the Eastern stream regularly travel between states, yet few organizations coordinate their farmworker-related activities across state lines. Numerous church denominations have set up programs to provide services to migrant workers, but few are in communication with each other. Information on laws, regulations, crewleaders, and local growers needs to be gathered for states in the stream and channeled to farmworker groups and advocacy organizations. Networking of church and social service organizations along the stream is an important step in building a support system for workers who are ready to organize on their own behalf.

## Hope for a Union

On Martin Luther King's birthday in 1983, the Florida sun shone brightly on the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) headquarters in Avon Park, a sharp contrast to the gloom of the early morning Belle Glade slave market, which is 75 miles to the south. Avon Park is home of the only union local of farmworkers on the East Coast and is a beacon of hope for the future.

The UFW members work in the citrus groves of the Minute Maid Corporation, which was bought by the Coca-Cola Company in 1960, the same year Edward R. Murrow aired his moving documentary. Ten years later, yet another television documentary (this time by NBC) focused national attention on the squalid living conditions of Florida's migrants, and Cesar Chavez's farmworkers union jumped on the opportunity to negotiate a union contract with boycott-

*photo by Joe Morris*

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WILL NOT OCCUR UNTIL FARMWORKERS THEMSELVES COME TOGETHER.**

sensitive Coca-Cola. For the 1,500 workers in Coca-Cola's citrus groves, pay scales finally rose above the minimum wage, crewleaders were replaced by union-controlled hiring halls, and sanitary facilities were provided for the first time in the fields.

After an emotional showing of the King documentary film, *From Montgomery to Memphis,* our tour group from North Carolina joined with local black and Hispanic workers and their families in "speaking out" about the meaning of the Civil Rights Movement in our own lives. Stories of hard fighting and slow victories followed, and the celebration ended with a roomful of tearful eyes, a circle of linked arms, and a rousing rendition of "We Shall Overcome."

The UFW celebrants of Martin Luther King Day represent a hard core of true believers in the dream that a union can be built for farmworkers on the East Coast. In spite of indifference from the national labor movement, a lack of resources from the UFW, which had its hands full surviving in California, and federal laws stacked in favor of the growers, the stirrings of small groups of East Coast farmworkers keep the hope of a better day alive.

The Avon Park workers are not alone. Across the state of Florida, grassroots groups of workers have formed self-help organizations with assistance from church agencies and community organizers. In southern New Jersey, migrating workers from Puerto Rico have formed a labor organization called CATA to fight for hiring, wages, and better living conditions. In North Carolina, local black seasonal workers have come together to form county-wide associations to press demands for local hiring of workers, pesticide protections, and sanitation facilities in the fields.

Surrounding these newly organized groups is a migrant stream seething with anger, discontent, and frustration at inhumane treatment. One of the major catalysts for this new agitation has been the entry in massive numbers of Haitian "boat people," who have become major recruitment targets for migrant crewleaders. Haitians have entered the cutthroat world of the Eastern stream with a deeply held sense of justice and dignity, which has led to field walkouts, legal suits, and continuing mini-protests.

Besides the protests of angry Haitian workers, the Eastern stream has also been shaken by the courageous actions of migrant Southern blacks. For years, the core of the stream has been single black male alcoholics, recruited from the soup kitchens and flop houses of the major metropolitan cities on the East Coast. Surprisingly, members of this traditionally silent group played a key role in the dramatic string of slavery convictions in the last few years. In each of the East Coast slavery cases, older black street people, like Joe Simes of Raleigh, North Carolina, risked their lives to provide eyewitness testimony about the interstate slavery and kidnap operations.

As a melting pot of ethnic and racial groups, the East Coast farmworker stream presents a unique challenge for organizing. For decades, growers have kept wages down and workers on the defensive by playing off different ethnic groups against each other and recruiting new pools of cheap labor, legally or illegally.

To break down these divisions, extensive organizing and indigenous leaders within each of the various ethnic communities of the stream must be developed. Then the question of union organizing returns to the point at which Cesar Chavez found himself in the mid-'60s. There are farmworkers who are ready to put their lives on the line to organize, but no mechanism exists for securing union recognition. Nor are there adequate resources from churches or the labor movement to carry out such a crusade.

Until there is a legislative remedy to the exclusion of farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act, the prospects for large-scale unionization are bleak indeed. In the meantime, there is plenty to be done to move the struggle forward, as Chavez did for years before winning the first farm labor contract. Political power in East Coast farmworker communities needs to be built and broadened as part of the larger rural black struggle for clout in state legislatures and in Washington. Laws, regulations, and intolerable conditions need to be attacked and changed in issue campaigns that can help build leadership and a greater sense of confidence within rural farm labor communities.

As the famous slogan of the UFW's California struggle reminds us, "Si se puede. It can be done." The workers did it in California. Across the South and on up the East Coast, it can also be done. □

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*photo by Joe Morris*

# The Union Makes A Difference

BY JAMES J. HORGAN

The United Farm Workers of America (UFW) is on the move in Florida, trying to organize the state's 200,000 farmworkers. The union held its first organizing conference there on March 6, 1983, a gathering of 85 delegates from 17 farmworker committees from across the citrus belt.

## Si Se Puede

They met in the American Legion Hall in Lake Wales, where colorful banners and homemade flags decorated the room and set the mood. "De Costa a Costa: California/Florida – Una Sola Union: One Union for Farm Workers." Another showed the UFW's black eagle spreading its wings over row upon row of bountiful green and orange citrus trees. "Hasta La Victoria." "United We Will Win." "El Comite de Winter Garden – En Florida Si Se Puede." Yes, it can be done.

The Reverend Joseph Owens, a Jesuit priest and then-director of the Florida branch of the National Farm Worker Ministry, set a lofty tone: "We are not just meeting. We are not just planning. We are not just organizing. We are working out our whole salvation, not just for us, but for those who make us suffer. For our whole society." Then he read a passage from Exodus. The children of Israel making bricks without straw. Relentless quotas. Confronting Pharoah. Arranging pressure. Marching to the Promised Land. The UFW regards Moses as the first labor organizer.

Ben Maddock came from California to address the group. He has been with the UFW since 1969 and is director of its citrus department. "Our purpose is to bring you together for the first time," he said, and then turned to the highlights of the union's history and its basic values: nonviolence, equality, democracy, justice.

Finally, Maddock got down to the business at hand: to hear wheat needs to be done. One by one, committee representatives from Lake Placid and Auburndale, Fort Pierce and Wachula, Frostproof and Sebring approached the microphone. All spoke of the need to organize, but Maddock urged them to be specific. He went around the circle four times, pressing for details.

The problems poured out. "We're tired of picking for nothing." Farmworkers want higher wages, of course. They also want the fringe benefits that industrial workers enjoy: medical coverage, vacations with pay, holidays, safety on the job, protection against pesticides, toilets in the fields. The list continues. Day care centers. Protection against harassment by the Border Patrol. Defeat of the proposed Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill, which they fear would make it easier for growers to flood the labor pool with foreign workers, depressing wages even further. Education in their rights. Voter registration. A law to protect their organizing and bargaining rights.

What they're up against is the state's $4.3 billion agricultural industry, in which citrus is the central element. Florida produces 75 percent of the citrus grown in the U.S. and more than 80 percent of its frozen concentrated juice. *Forbes Magazine*'s special 1982 issue on "The 400 Richest People in America" found five Florida citrus magnates nestled in with the Rockefellers and duPonts: James Emmet Evans ($135 million), Jesse J. Parrish, Jr. ($110 million), Jack M. Berry, Sr. ($120 million), Ben Hill Griffin, Jr. ($150 million), and the Lykes family ($1 billion).

The state has about 15,000 orange growers, but 40 processors dominate the industry, and their profits have attracted the interest of giant conglomerates. In 1982 alone, five major corporations purchased Florida citrus operations; newcomers are the Libby, McNeill & Libby division of Nestle; Campbell Soup Company; the Seven-

Up subsidiary of Philip Morris, Inc.; Quaker Oats; and the Del Monte division of R.J. Reynolds. Earlier entrants to the Florida citrus scene are Procter & Gamble, Beatrice Foods, Royal Crown, Dart & Kraft, Lykes Brothers, and the Coca-Cola Company. The USDA reported in 1983 that "for the first time more than half the orange juice squeezed in Florida will be processed in conglomerate-owned plants."

As the industry becomes more and more a creature of corporations, can the United Farm Workers Union really respond to those workers' concerns? Does unionization make a difference? Ask the workers at Coca-Cola's Minute Maid subsidiary, who voted 90 percent for UFW representation in a union authorization election on December 17, 1971. The company, nurturing its public image and also aware of how vulnerable it would be to an as-yet-unthreatened boycott, signed a UFW contract on February 29, 1972, and has renewed the agreement ever since. It's the only UFW contract on the East Coast.

What they say is: "The union makes a big difference." And they talk about four kinds of change they attribute to the union contract at Coke: in wages, fringe benefits, health and safety, and self-confidence.

## A Decent Wage

"Farmworkers feed the whole world," says Gus Thornton, "but we can't get a decent rate for ourselves." At 60, he has been in the fields for nearly 40 years, never with a union. A black war veteran and local commander of the American Legion, his Lake Wales Organizing Committee was host for the UFW's spring conference. "If you don't want to pick," he adds, "they can always get somebody else." Some workers don't even make the $3.35-an-hour federal minimum wage.

On an average day, unorganized workers make $30 to $35 harvesting oranges, but consider $50 to $60 a good day, which they wish were standard. "The average fruit picker, he might have a good day today and maybe tomorrow," explains Thornton. "And then he may have three or four bad days. That's the way it works. If it was continuous, then you could see yourself getting somewhere."

At Coca-Cola, the average citrus harvester will make $54 a day in the 1983-84 season. Coke worker Harry Marshall, of Frostproof, made $8,050 in oranges and grapefruit from November 29, 1982, to the short-season's end on June 28. His earnings for the year will be around $10,000. Marshall used to "go up the road" in the off-season – vegetables in Ohio and Michigan, cherries and apples in upstate New York. Higher union wages and the 1974 federal unemployment insurance law have stabilized his life. If he earns at least $250 a week for 20 weeks, he qualifies for the maximum unemployment insurance payment of $125 a week, enough to sustain him until the season starts up again.

Systematic statistics on farmworker earnings are hard to come by. No government agency keeps separate track of Florida citrus earnings. The industry itself claims that it paid an average of 71 cents a box for oranges in 1981-82, which declined to 70 cents the following season. (The typical harvester can pick approximately eight boxes an hour.) Coca-Cola piece-rate workers averaged $7.49 an hour harvesting oranges and $7.59 for grapefruit in 1982-83. In the eight-month season from December to July, they were able to work for an average of 127 days – hard work, up and down the ladder, lugging a 90-pound picking sack of oranges. They face unpaid rainy days, mid-season layoffs when the fruit is not ripe, and daily production limits from the processing plant. Consequently, their annual earnings are affected.

An analysis of 408 UFW payroll records (45 percent of the harvesting force) for 1980-81 shows that the median Coca-Cola citrus harvester earned $6,074 in 29 weeks of available work. One-third made more than $7,000. Fourteen workers (3.4 percent) earned more than $10,000 during the season, including the highest earner, who made $12,114. Subsequent raises should bring median earnings to $7,025 in the 1983-84 season.

In contrast to unorganized workers, who have little input on the "take-it-or-leave-it" wages, UFW workers negotiate their pay. Year-round, grove-support workers won time-and-a-half after 40 hours. Seasonal harvesters have established an equitable system of setting rates. The company agreed to a "guaranteed box price average" in annual July wage negotiations – 90 cents a box for 1983-84.

Unionization has brought a sense of stability to the Coca-Cola labor force. Most see themselves as career farmworkers. They are not migrants. The company in past years has employed as many as 5,000 different workers in its 900 harvester and 250 grove-support jobs in the course of a season. In 1980-81, only 2,360 people held those 1,150 jobs. And there was high turnover in only 270 of the harvester positions (taken by 1,500 different workers, 600 of whom worked at Coke for fewer than 20 days). The remaining 630 harvesters (70 percent) worked regularly throughout the season – a steady job for them.

In addition to negotiated rates, the UFW won an unparalleled exploitation adjustment in a 1972

*photo courtesy UFW*

**UFW STRIKES OVER PIECE RATES, COCA-COLA, 1979.**

arbitration. Workers are paid in units of tubs, which purportedly hold 10 90-pound boxes of oranges. The union contended that they actually hold more. The arbitrator agreed. Since then, Coke workers have been paid for an extra quarter-box for each "10-box tub" they fill. It means another $170 a year for the average worker.

Before the union, Coca-Cola often required Saturday and Sunday work – seven days. Harvesters now have a five-day week. Child labor is also eliminated, but it is still not unusual in non-unionized groves: family groups, with parents dropping fruit from the trees and children picking it up off the ground. Imagine auto workers taking their children to the Ford plant because they can't earn enough themselves. "The union got us enough wages for a man to make a good pay, where he can afford to school his child, just like he should," says Johnnie Lee Woodard of Avon Park.

## Fringe Benefits

"I've never been in an organization that gave me and my family as many benefits as we get now in my whole born life," says the Reverend Hugh Salary, a 63-year-old harvester and preacher, who has worked 11 seasons for Coke.

UFW workers now receive the benefits people in other industries take for granted. Coca-Cola contributes 47 cents an hour to the union's Robert F. Kennedy Medical Plan, which also includes $6,000 in life insurance. Workers get paid vacations of one to four weeks, depending on length of service, nine paid holidays, plus 10 days of paid sick leave a year, along with jury-duty pay and paid funeral leave. The company pays five cents an hour into the UFW's Martin Luther King, Jr., Farm Workers Fund for the development of service centers (agencies to help workers address community problems), and 20 cents an hour into the UFW's retirement fund, unprecedented in American agriculture.

"I never thought I'd have a pension plan," says Elisha Woodson, who recently retired and will draw $50 a month, the modest minimum payment, to supplement his Social Security. "Last year when I got my vacation pay, I hardly knew what to say," adds Lloyd Salary, a $4.80-an-hour equipment operator. "It was more than $500. I ain't never had that kind of money once in my hand." "Who around here – any fruit picker for other companies – gets those kind of benefits?" asks Julio Vasquez.

## Control of Pesticides

Non-unionized workers describe their problems with dangerous chemicals. "Sometimes you're in the tree picking, and they'll come along in the next grove beside you," says Gus Thornton. Especially sulfur, used for rust mites. "When you pick that fruit with that sulfur, you cry all night. It gets in your eyes. They say, 'Wash it out with an orange or a grapefruit.' Hah! I think every fruit picker has bad eyes because of that spray. It really gets to you."

Such abuses are not tolerated by Coca-Cola's UFW workers. In the case of sulfur, the contract provides for a five-day waiting period before people can be sent into the groves, unless there has been a one-inch rainfall or 12 hours of irrigation. Particularly hazardous pesticides are specifically banned. (Most are also prohibited by federal law, but an anti-regulatory administration might restore them to general use; not at a unionized company.) Safety garments are also provided. Drinking water and field toilets are mandated.

The use of the pesticide Temik has recently been an issue in Florida. After the discovery that the water table is contaminated, public outcry was so strong that the state Secretary of Agriculture issued a temporary ban in 1983. Temik was outlawed at Coca-Cola in 1981.

## Security and Dignity

"Before I joined the union, I was very shy," says Julio Vasquez, now Avon Park area representative on the Coca-Cola Ranch Committee. Exhibiting an aroused sense of self-assurance, he goes on: "I didn't defend myself. I didn't stand up for my rights. I worked like a slave. The foreman, he'd say, 'You either pick or go home.' I'd say to myself, 'Well, I don't have nothing to do at home, so I'll pick.' It was like a slave. By being in the union, I've changed. I don't think that way any more."

The union gives farmworkers an awareness of their dignity and the power they have in unity. It also gives them training and opportunity for personal growth. Through its participatory "ranch committee" structure (a term borrowed from California,

photo courtesy UFW

CESAR CHAVEZ WITH COKE WORKERS IN AN INDIANTOWN GROVE, 1976.

where agricultural operations are called "ranches"), the workers take charge of their own affairs as crew stewards, negotiators, and elected representatives. "That's what I like about this union," says Elisha Woodson. "It just picked them up right out of the crew and put them in office."

Their sense of unity gives them psychological self-confidence. "They know they've got somebody to stand with them," explains Woodson. They demonstrate, confront the company when necessary, and even lobby at the state capital, buttonholing legislators on political issues. "If there hadn't been a union," says Harry Marshall, "you couldn't have found people to go up to Tallahassee and different places like that, because they would have been afraid that they would be fired."

"In the past when there was no union, there was a lot of favoritism and discrimination," continues Marshall. "To give you an example, there are different qualities of work in the same grove at the same price. Some are better than others. Relatives of foremen would get the best part, or their friends. The rest would either do what the crewleader said, or the next day they wouldn't even catch the bus. Now by having a contract, something like that won't go on."

Coke workers are now protected with a union hiring hall. The company gives notice of a need for 30 or 40 workers; the union recruits them. Hirings, recalls, layoffs, and promotions are done by seniority. There is assurance of job security, safeguards against arbitrary company action, and protection in basic matters of health and safety.

Lloyd Salary senses the apprehension in unorganized workers and recognizes the strength unionization offers: "They tell me, 'We can't go up and fight the white folks because those white folks last longer.' So I tell them it ain't the matter how long they last. If you get a union, they have to recognize you. If you take one little string and add another to it, every time it gets harder and harder to break. If you get together, that's it."

Corine Dorsey of Avon Park, one of the union's leaders, explains how rallies can help build this spirit: "People like that. We marched. We had cars, flags, and everything. That's what made them strong." In 1982, at age 65, she made a six-city tour sponsored by the National Farm Worker Ministry, telling the union story in places as far away as Toronto and Washington.

What has the union meant to Coca-Cola's workers? "Protection," sums up Hugh Salary. "Before I joined the union," adds his brother Lloyd, "I always did want me a house. But I didn't see no way in the world I could get it. Now I've got one." "Just to be treated like a person," adds Johnnie Lee Woodard. "The union was the start of that, sure was."

Organizing the union in Florida will be long and slow. Cesar Chavez has a favorite saying: "The growers have money. We have time. Time is our money." This hope sustains unorganized workers like Ben Snowdon of Lake Wales as he contemplates the future:

"I have five grandsons that I'm thinking about. I would like for them to plan for themselves when they get old enough. I hope they won't have to make a living picking fruit like their grandfather. But I hope by that time it'll be union all over. By that time, it'll be better for them than it was for me." □

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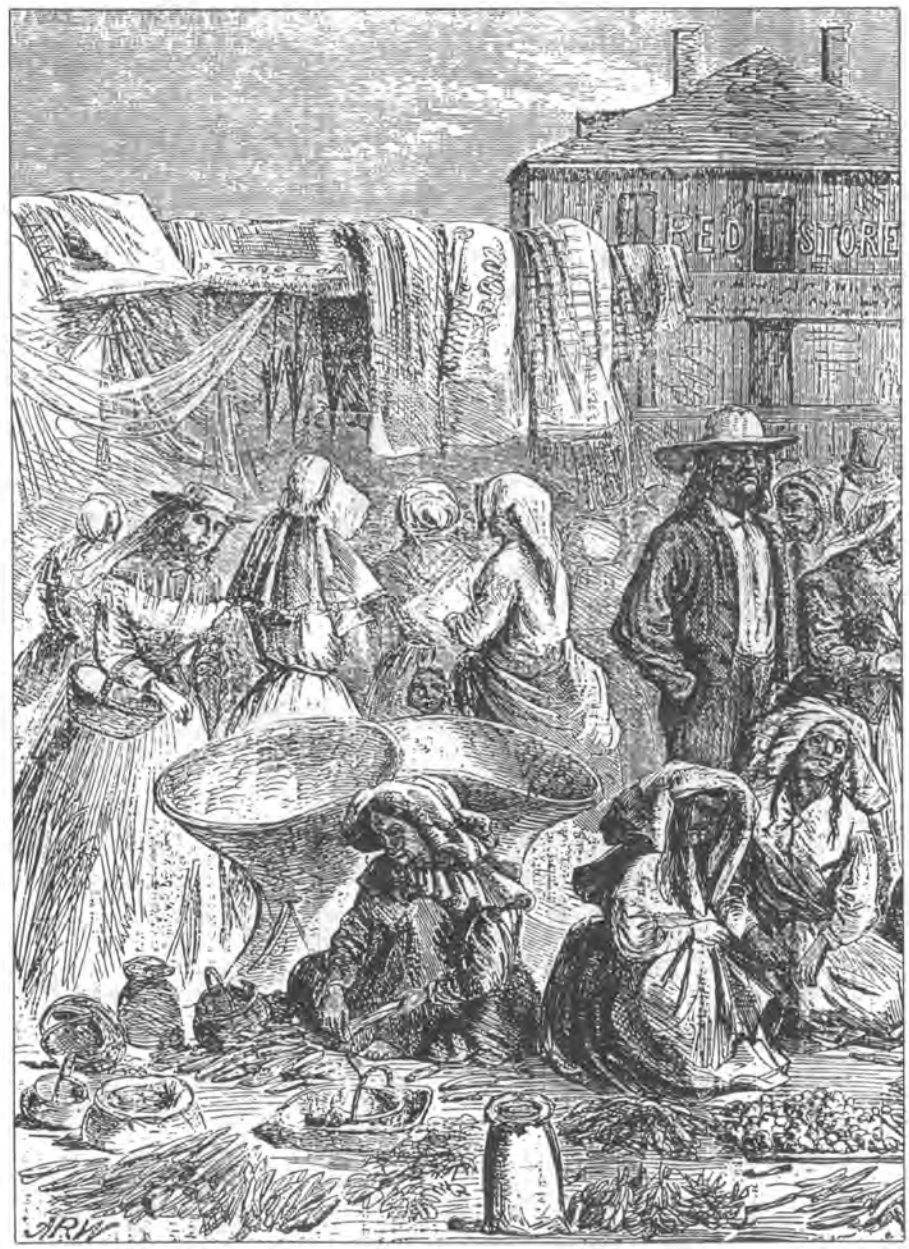
photo by Philip van Buren

**AT UFW HEADQUARTERS IN AVON PARK, 1983.**

*LEARNING FROM THE CHOCTAW OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH*

*by Daniel H. Usner, Jr.*

# Food from Nature




SUNDAY AT THE FRENCH MARKET IN NEW ORLEANS.

Reading a book on the Creole cookery of the Gulf Coast area is like leafing through an informal history, tracing dishes back to the eighteenth century when French and Spanish settlers, Africans both slave and free, migrants from the British colonies to the east, and the original Indian inhabitants of the region introduced their cooking habits and eating tastes to each other.

The foodways of the Choctaw Indians of the colonial Deep South, well documented by European travelers of the time, offer a rich opportunity to examine ways of using nature without destroying it. Probably more than any other North American region, this coastal area encompassing present-day Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana is home to a distinctive cuisine deeply influenced by the many groups of people who have inhabited it through the years. Identifying precisely how and when the various cross-cultural influences evolved into that cuisine is impossible – but nonetheless an engrossing exercise.

The French in 1699, like the Spanish at St. Augustine and the English at Jamestown in their "starving times," desperately depended upon Indian supplies of food as they built Louisiana's first post at Biloxi Bay. The Biloxis, Mobilians, and other Gulf Coast natives traded surpluses of corn and meat with the French. They taught them the cultivation and preparation of corn – proving especially important to the French, whose hopes of growing wheat were defeated by the local heat and humidity. And soldiers, sailors, and other voyagers from Mobile and Biloxi made long visits to Indian villages, where they learned intimately how Southern Indians procured and prepared their food.

The Choctaws – a large tribe of the interior pine-wooded hills of the South – entered the colonial food market gradually, as epidemics disastrously weakened Indian communities along the coast and the Mississippi River and as Louisiana advanced its trading efforts. In 1702 Choctaw dignitaries met at Mobile with Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, founder of the French colony of Louisiana, and established what

would become one of the strongest and most important Indian/Colonial alliances of eighteenth-century North America. By the 1720s deerskins were the major staple of Choctaw commerce with Louisiana, providing the colony with a much-needed export commodity.

The tribe also regularly exchanged food items for European merchandise. They fed traders and other travelers who visited their villages and sold their farming and hunting products to settlers along the Gulf Coast and to soldiers stationed near their towns at Fort Tombecbé. Called the "nation of bread" by Bernard Romans, an eighteenth-century cartographer and naturalist, Choctaw Indians sold corn, poultry, and vegetables in the market at Mobile. On at least one occasion they shipped "six hundred Bushells of Corn besides a Considerable Quantity of Deer Skins" down the Pascagoula River. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, hunting parties of Choctaw men, women, and children made venison, bear meat and oil, and other culinary treats available to whomever they encountered across the Lower Mississippi Valley.

A closer look at eighteenth-century Choctaw livelihood reveals a rich diversity of foodways, some of which greatly influenced colonial Louisianans. The *Chahta okla*, as they call themselves, inhabited approximately 50 different villages over some 4,000 square miles of what is now eastern Mississippi and western Alabama. By 1775 their population had been reduced to 13,000, half of its pre-colonial size.

The Choctaws planted their crops on select bottomlands bordering their villages. Whereas the hills and bluffs of Choctaw country were covered by a mixed pine and oak forest, the lowlands supported a cypress and oak forest with thick patches of cane. The Indians cleared the canebrakes by cutting and burning, turning them into fertile fields.

A keen observer of Indian agricultural methods, Antoine Le Page du Pratz described how Indian farmers cut the canes and peeled a ring of several feet of bark off the bases of the trees. Two weeks later they would set the dry canes afire, and "the sap of the trees are thereby made to descend, and the branches are burnt, which kills the trees." A field prepared in this way acquired high fertility without much labor and without animal fertilizers. The seeds of corn were sown directly into the nutritive ashes of burnt wood and cane. This system of agriculture did, however, require that the lowland fields be left fallow after several harvest seasons for new vegetation to grow, and thus led to periodic relocation of villages.

Groups of entire families planted and harvested these large fields, and in smaller household gardens Choctaw women grew beans, small corn, tobacco, and even vegetables adopted from Europeans and Africans. After the gardens were sown and as soon as bayou waters receded, usually by the beginning of May, the Choctaws planted their staple corn, pumpkins, and melons on the village bottomlands. From then until the harvest in August, the women generally weeded and tended to all of the crops, misleading some passing observers to believe that Indian men did not till the soil. As the eighteenth century proceeded, the traditional Choctaw horticultural produce was supplemented by chickens, hogs, and even some horses and cattle – many of which went into colonial trade.

Choctaw cuisine was an imaginative blending of cultivated and wild foods, characteristic of Indian economies across the land. James Adair, a trader who traveled extensively among Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw villages, expressed delight over "the great variety of dishes they make out of wild flesh, corn, beans, peas, potatoes, pompions, dried fruits, herbs, and roots." One ingredient very special to the local cuisine was *filé*, a powder of ground sassafras leaves destined to be used as the base of the dish known as gumbo.

To make *paluska holbi*, their basic bread, Choctaw women stirred boiling water into cornmeal, pounded it into a stiff dough, and shaped the dough into small rolls. After wrapping these rolls inside clean corn shucks and tying them with strips of shuck, they then cooked the bread under hot ashes. Sometimes they added chestnut or hickory oil to the cornmeal for a richer taste.

The Choctaws also ate *bunaha*, a bread prepared by mixing dried beans, wild potatoes, or hickory meat with cornmeal, making rolls wrapped in shucks, and boiling them in water. Other processed foods included hickory meat and persimmon bread. But the most important item in the Indian diet was *tanfula*, called by the French "sagamité a la lessive" or lye hominy, which the Choctaws always had available for hungry travelers and even carried into the settlements.

Choctaw women made, and still make, *tanfula* by covering finely pounded and well-sifted corn with boiling water, mixing in some wood-ash lye, and maintaining a boil for a few hours. Eighteenth-century observers usually explained the use of wood-ash lye in terms of adding flavor, color, or bulk to sagamité. We now know, however, that high-alkaline lye derived from ashes actually enhances the nutritional quality of corn protein and protects people who eat a corn-based diet against pellagra. To produce an alkaline solution, Choctaw women pour cold water over clean wood ashes placed in a hopper. As the water seeps into the ashes, a yellow lye drips down the trough and into a small container. The mixture of this lye with cornmeal maximizes the concentration of essential amino acids.

During the winter months Choctaw villagers hunted for game in small, mobile camps. Hunting parties of 10 or so Indian families dispersed along rivers and bayous were such a regular feature of the colonial landscape that they rarely seemed noteworthy except to visitors like Bernard Romans. But Choctaw hunting camps played a signi-

## THE VIEW FROM 1775

The Chactaws are very hospitable at their hunting camps, and there only they will entertain a stranger at free cost.

Here I must relate a particular custom of these people: When a deer or bear is killed by them, they divide the liver into as many pieces as there are fires, and send a boy to each with a piece, that the men belonging to each fire may burn it, but the women's fires are excluded from this ceremony, and if each party kills one or more animals, the livers of them are all treated in the same manner.

Horses of a good kind are in such plenty as to be sold for a kegg of four gallons half water rum; they would be excellent were it not that they back them before the animals attain two years of age.

They cultivate for bread all the species and varieties of the *Zea*, likewise two varieties of that species of *Panicum* vulgarly called guinea corn: a greater number of different *Phaseolus* and *Dolichos* than any I have seen elsewhere; the esculent *Convolvulus* (vulgo) sweet potatoes, and the *Helianthus Giganteus*; with the seed of the last made into flour and mixed with flour of the *Zea* they make a very palatable bread: they have carried the spirit of husbandry so far as to cultivate leeks, garlic, cabbage and some other garden plants, of which they make no use, in order to make a profit of them to the traders; they also used to carry poultry to market at Mobile, although it lays at the distance of an hundred and twenty miles from the nearest town: dunghill fowls and a very few ducks, with some hogs, are the only esculent animals raised in the nation.

They make many kinds of bread of the above grains with the help of water, eggs, or hickory milk: they boil the esculent convolvulus and eat it with the hickory milk; they boil green ears of corn, they boil corn and beans together, and make many other preparations of their vegetables, but fresh meat they have only at the hunting season, and then they never fail to eat while it lasts; of their fowls and hogs they seldom eat any as they keep them for profit.

In failure of their crops, they make bread of the different kinds of *Fagus*, or the *Diospyros*, of a species of *Convolvulus* with a tuberous root found in the low cane grounds, of the root of a species of *Smilax*, of live oak acorns, and of the young shoots of the *Canna*; in summer many wild plants chiefly of the *Drupi* and *Bacciferous* kind supply them.

*– Bernard Romans,*
*A Concise Natural History*
*of East and West Florida*
*(1775)*

ficant role in the frontier economy of the Deep South.

The procuring of venison and deerskins usually began with burning away the undergrowth in small patches of forest. With controlled fires, hunters both enhanced the nutritional quality of the plants the deer browsed on and eased passage for the animals through the woods. Southern Indians generally also set fires to prairies to drive deer and smaller mammals into hunting range. In another popular method of hunting, the men carried deer heads to decoy the animals and then shot them at close range. In the winter camps, skins were tanned for the pelt trade, plenty of fresh meat was eaten daily, and some venison was dried into strips of jerky for later use or sale.

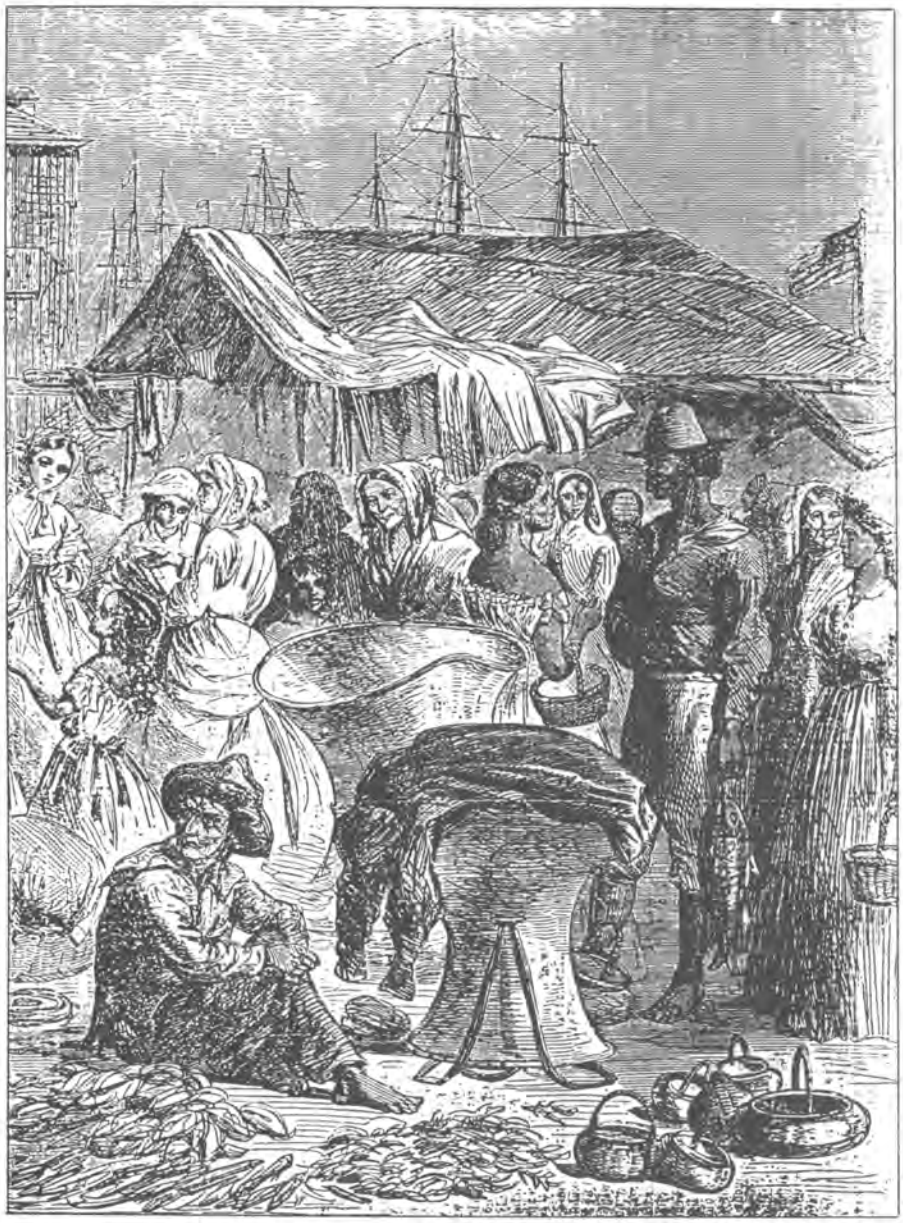
Bear oil produced by Choctaw and other Indian hunters was a particularly important food item in eighteenth-century Louisiana. Black bears hibernating along thickly vegetated waterways in mid-winter were smoked out of hollow trees and shot as they emerged. The Choctaws produced the oil by boiling bear flesh and fat together and stored it in plugged deer heads or dried bladders. Colonial and native inhabitants of the South used bear oil for both cooking and curing purposes. They boiled the fat in a kettle, sprinkling in some laurel and salt, and after a week of settling the clear oil that surfaced was ready either for frying food or for applying to rheumatic parts of the body.

Further rounding out their array of food sources, the Choctaws employed various methods of fishing. Besides using bone and wooden hooks, gradually replaced by metal ones, Indian fishers caught river and coastal fish, such as the salt-water trout known as *nani shupik* to the Choctaws, with spears thrown from the shore or from their pirogues. In ponds and small streams, the latter called *bok ushi* by the Choctaws and corrupted to "bayou" by the French, Indians sprinkled poisonous herbs that temporarily deadened favorite fish such as catfish and drum, causing them to float to the surface where they were seined by waiting fishers.

Well into the nineteenth century, Choctaw Indians furnished the town markets of Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans with a variety of foods and other items. Some of these Choctaw peddlers came from settled communities formed along the Pearl River and Bayou Lacombe. Others lived in more mobile groups, resembling the older winter hunting camps. A large number of Choctaws and other Louisiana Indians gathered each year on the outskirts of *Balbbancha*, or the "place of foreign languages," as they called New Orleans, peddling venison, water fowl, and other game, along with manufactures such as baskets, sieves, and cane blow-guns. They also sold kindling wood, wild fruits, medicinal herbs, and culinary spices.

The production and distribution of food holds great symbolic meaning in social and political relations, as many anthropologists have noted. Like other traditional societies, the Choctaws had ritualized foodways in their methods of planting and harvesting, hunting and gathering, eating and exchanging. The sharing of food was a means of defining and maintaining relationships with kinspeople and outsiders.

Indian villagers across the South bestowed plenty of food upon eighteenth-century travelers and expected reciprocity. Whenever on a diplomatic or trade journey to a colonial settlement, the Choctaws carried just enough food to reach their destina-



tion, expecting official hosts to provision them hospitably during the stay and for the return trip. Food shared helped maintain cordial relations; food denied could initiate hostile relations. A breakdown in the food-giving protocol occasionally resulted in acts of banditry by Indians against the livestock and crops of settlers.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, as Louisiana underwent the drastic changes in population, economy, and politics that culminated in its becoming a United States territory, the loss of valuable Indian lands and the disruption of exchange rituals reached chronic proportions. Reciprocity had given way to avarice as the newcomers sought to gain total ownership of Indian lands. Stingier provisions of food and drink offered by government officials and more frequent raids on the fields and herds of white farmers by Indian bandits signaled the decline of Choctaw political power in the rising Cotton South.

A series of treaties with the United States during the early nineteenth century reduced the territorial domain of the *Chahta okla*, greatly inhibiting their ability to produce enough food for survival. Finally, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 forced the removal of the Choctaw Nation from Mississippi to less productive lands in what became known as the Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Although the Choctaws as a political entity were forced out of the state and a majority of them migrated to the new land, many Choctaw people remained in the Deep South, continuing to produce and market food in both Louisiana and Mississippi.

Black and white Southerners learned useful foodways from their Indian neighbors and, furthermore, adapted them imaginatively to their own changing needs and tastes. For example, Afro-Americans found Indian techniques of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants useful in supplementing their small rations and especially helpful in widening their economic activities beyond the control of the slave economy. Other farmers in the piney woods and backwater prairies likewise enhanced their economic self-determination by borrowing Indian land-use practices. The method of burning forests for farming, hunting, and herding, in particular, persisted in the South and became an increasing source of conflict between plain folk who depended upon mixed crops, wild foods, and livestock in their diet and investors who wanted to proscribe the traditionally diverse use of resources in favor of specialized purposes such as cotton and timber production.

The commercialization of agricultural production across the Southern states not only propelled the removal of Indian peoples from what would become the cotton belt; it also denied subsequent occupants of the region access to what were once places of plentiful and diversified food sources. As more land and labor were committed to growing single-export products, the effective techniques of farming, hunting, and gathering devised by Southern Indians were replaced by a greater dependence upon a capricious market and fewer plants and animals for sustenance. But their example in diversifying crops, replenishing the soil, using wild foods, and even in bartering produce need not be forgotten. In the time-tested foodways noted by eighteenth-century witnesses, the Choctaws demonstrated both the productive potential and the cultural richness of a mixed food economy. □

*Daniel H. Usner, Jr., is a native of New Orleans and student of Louisiana's past. He teaches history at Cornell University.*

*The drawings are by A.R. Waud and were originally published in* ***Harper's Weekly****, August 18, 1866.*

*By Susan Tyler Hitchcock*

# Gather Ye Wild Things

*Drawings by G. B. McIntosh*

Gathering wild things can become a year-round preoccupation, a way of life. The landscape changes shape when you start noticing which plants grow where, which plants are good for what. Good-for-nothing back lots turn into fruitful havens. Weeds in the garden look as good as the vegetables. Forest underbrush begins to tell a story as intricate as an illuminated manuscript, once one takes the time to read it.

Plants can tell the story of how life was for eons, before mass-processed food and synthetic pharmaceuticals turned our attention from the land. Most Indian vocabularies included hundreds of words for plants, their parts, their growing phases, and their uses. Native Americans had reason to make those discriminations: their health and livelihood depended on awareness of the plants that grew around them. Nowadays not so many people distinguish shapes among the green.

Plants can tell the story of how life might become tomorrow, if energy resources dwindle and supermarkets shut down. Someday we may no longer be able to count on the massive network of trucks, tractors, trains, processing centers, and monster machinery that stocks food and drugstore shelves. We are already turning to neighborhood farms and backyard gardens: sowing seeds, pulling weeds.

I guess that some people think weeds get in the way. Others ignore them. Parents often tell children that this or that is poison, don't eat it, out of ignorance, not knowledge. Poisonous plants do grow all around us. Some could kill. But distinguishable from those few grow hundreds of plants, benign and helpful, which humankind has gathered and put to use for ages.

Some people seem devoted not just to ignoring this bounty but to destroying it as well. I stepped into the hardware store the other day and browsed through the herbicides, just out of curiosity. Here's a partial list, copied from two cans on the shelf, of plants guaranteed dead, thanks to the contents therein: birch, blackberry, box elder, brambles, chickweed, chicory, clover, dandelion, dock, elderberry, honeysuckle, heal-all, henbit, knotweed, lamb's quarters, mallow, mustard, oxalis, pigweed, plantain, purslane, sassafras, sheep sorrel, sumac, wild carrot, wild garlic, wild grape, wild onion, wild plum, wild radish, wild rose, wood sorrel, yarrow.

Man-made poisons have complicated the practice of gathering wild things. Herbicides, pesticides, and auto exhaust fumes damage us by damaging the soil that supports our green surroundings. If we eat plants, wild greens, or cultivated vegetables grown within their range, we might be poisoning ourselves.

Plants in cities and along automotive thoroughfares breathe deeply of lead. Their lead content decreases logarithmically with their distance from the road, and beyond 100 feet the concentration returns to safe levels. Lead appears to coat leaves more than it seeps into roots. City greens always need washing, then steaming on a rack over boiling water, which will absorb most of the remaining lead. Outside cities, railroad and power line right-of-ways often reek of poisons too. But some produce lush greenery and fruit nonetheless, a sign of nature's unceasing fecundity. We should avoid gathering in places where we have spewed our fumes. I like instead to picture a time when berries bloom clean again.

I have a plan. We can stop poisoning and start gathering the weeds. Our bodies and our earth will live more healthfully, and we'll still keep weeds from taking over.

We gain so much from gathering wild things. Little research has pursued the nutritional value of wild plants. The few studies that exist, though, consistently prove that wild greens, particularly common weeds like dandelion, lamb's quarters, purslane, and amaranth, offer higher amounts of most vitamins and minerals than any garden vegetable gives. The wild world provides.

Wild plants have received some medical attention. Poke, may apple, and periwinkle are proving to contribute to the treatment of cancer. The cures require laboratory-extracted dosages, however; they are not home

remedies. Scientific journals mention most herbal cures, if they mention them at all, as curious folk traditions. But herbs have helped soothe my stomach; I feel sassafras gives me a charge. But I can't explain why, nor have I found anyone else trying to explain it.

No one needs a scientific background to gather chicory or dandelions. Conveniently, many of the most useful plants also grow most commonly. They break through cracks in city sidewalks. I've seen lamb's quarters, purslane, mullein, amaranth, sheep sorrel and wood sorrel, chicory, and dandelion in downtowns East and West. My book, *Gather Ye Wild Things*, reflects the turn of seasons with 52 chapters, one for each week of the gathering year here in Virginia, where I live. Four of these essays, on wild foods common to the South, are condensed here.

## Lamb's Quarters

Lamb's quarters is one of those wild plants whose virtues have been lost in tradition. Somewhere along the way it picked up the common name pigweed – a term I try to avoid, since people use it for several unrelated weeds. Apparently lamb's quarters gained a reputation some time back as a plant fit for fodder: for hogs but not for humans. The word "pigweed" came into use in the mid-1800s, as the railroads cut through to the West. It seems that white settlers used the term for many plants that nourished the tribes they were displacing. The plants survived, but continue to suffer a misnomer. Let's bring all the plants called pigweed – lamb's quarters, purslane, wild amaranth, probably some others – back into the human fold.

The nutritional facts on these so-called pigweeds are compelling. Lamb's quarters is a good example. An adult needs about 5,000 international units (IUs) of vitamin A daily. A half cup of lamb's quarters offers 14,000 to 16,000 IUs, depending on the season. We need about 70 milligrams of vitamin C each day. Lamb's quarters, again half a cup, gives 66 to 130 milligrams of vitamin C. Over the summer, the vitamin A content of lamb's quarters increases while the vitamin C content goes down. Lamb's quarters offers significant plant protein, supplies over one-third the adult daily requirement for calcium (about 309 milligrams in half a cup), and provides one of the highest fiber contents of any vegetable, wild or cultivated. And it tastes good too.

Lamb's quarters grows profusely throughout the continent of North America, in city lots and country fields alike, preferring scrubby spaces, compost piles, and garden corners to the wide-open places. Once you know its shield-shaped leaf, passing through variations with the seasons, you will see it everywhere.

Lamb's quarters grows to three, four, even five feet tall when we let it. Secondary stalks branch out from a thick ribbed spine. The leaves are jagged diamonds, dark green with a frosty sheen that intensifies in toward each budding center. As summer proceeds, lamb's quarters' leaves dwindle and seeds develop. The leaves respond visibly to difficult conditions, mottling red and yellow and blue when the air gets too cold or the soil too spent. But under most conditions lamb's quarters grows full and healthy all summer long. Its leaves have substance, like spinach or kale, their color the bluest of the weedy greens.

Lamb's quarters can get woody as summer moves on. A good rule of thumb is, if you can break it off easily you can chew it easily too. Gather just the tender tips as the plant grows large. The bunching green flowers concentrate its high food value. So do the star-shaped seeds, which can be harvested for winter cooking. Chop down a whole plant once the seeds have formed. Hang it upside down in a cool dry place. Spread newspapers under it to catch falling seeds or enclose each plant in a paper bag. When the plant is dry enough so that a leaf will crackle, shake the seeds onto papers or into a bag. Some chaff will remain. You can separate it in the wind, before a fan or hair blower, or in small quantities just by gently puffing. Or you can tolerate the chaff – it's just dried lamb's quarters. Sprinkle gathered seeds over omelets or casseroles for a protein-rich garnish.

I use lamb's quarters all summer long to add green to a meal, whether cooked or in a salad. I stir-fry onions, garlic, and lamb's quarters into an omelet for breakfast, a meal that reminds me of a morning several years ago, when a friend stirred green leaves into our eggs and I wondered, weeds for breakfast? Now I eat lamb's quarters many a morning: how my life has changed. I also add lamb's quarters sprigs to many summer salads.

Neither the taste, the texture, nor the nutritional riches of lamb's quarters warrant the condescension registered in the name "pigweed." Some people still pull up these weeds and feed them to the pigs. They raise healthy animals, to be sure. But others, with human friends and family to feed, are beginning to discover what pigs have known for quite a while: lamb's quarters is a valuable weed.

**LAMB'S QUARTERS – *CHENOPODIUM ALBUM* – GROWS PROFUSELY IN CITY LOTS AND COUNTRY FIELDS ALIKE, IN SCRUBBY SPACES, COMPOST PILES, AND GARDEN CORNERS.**

## Cattails

No one has trouble recognizing cattails. That long, tall shape, which we've seen in landscape paintings and autumnal bouquets since childhood, is so familiar, we hardly notice stands of cattails lining our highways. Cattails just belong there. Each year they undertake a primitive yet intricate cycle of growth and flowering that culminates in the conventional image of a brown velvet cob. But native dwellers of six continents – North Americans 300 years ago and Australian aborigines today – have noticed in detail the cycles of the cattail, for they have found abundant uses for many of its growing parts.

As each new part of the cattail plant emerges, green and tender, it is edible. Root buds in winter, young green shoots in spring, green flowers in spring and early summer. Even the bright yellow pollen as it seeks to leave its source can be collected at just the right moment and used or stored for later, a bright yellow addition to any grainy dish. You can consider that the cattails, most common among them *Typha latifolia*, are safe for the trying. Not all may be palatable at every phase of growth, but many are good, and none will harm you.

Cattail shoots have received the most acclaim as "Cossack asparagus," named for peasant soldiers from the Ukraine who foraged for the blanched inner shoots of spring cattails, rarely finding them as tasty as those that grew along the banks of their home river, the Don.

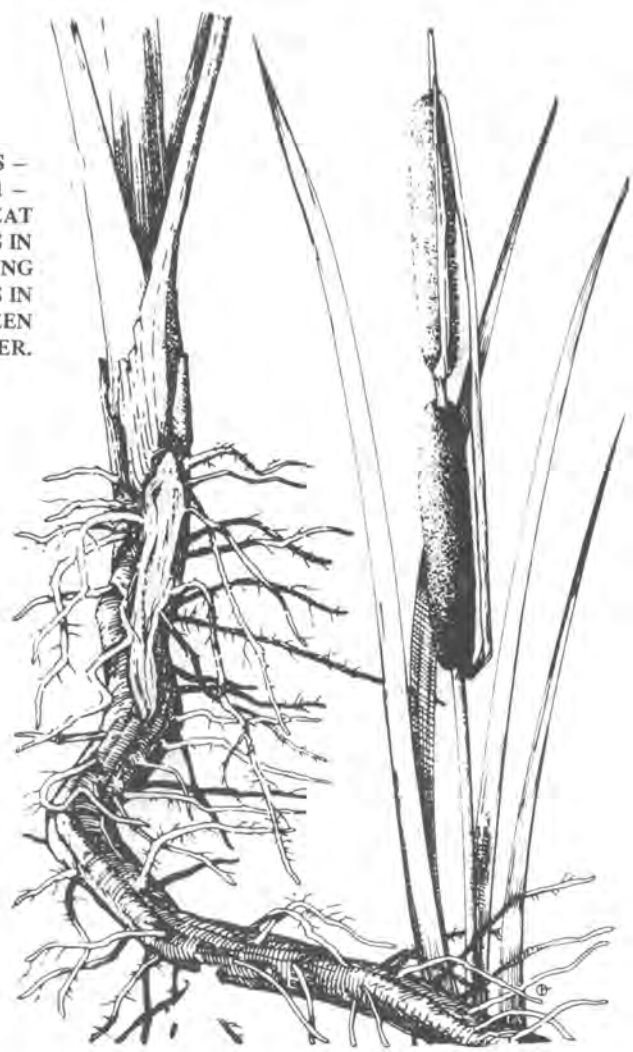
Cattail roots and cattail pollen, the origin and the outpouring of this useful plant, call for entirely different methods of gathering and use. Cattail roots can be gathered all winter long, while for cattail pollen one must catch the moment in late spring or early summer when bright gold dust begins to scatter. Cattail roots require long and intricate preparation, but one uses cattail pollen as is.

Cattail roots branch, creep, and thread their way down into the mud of marshes, swamps, and streams. They will achieve a diameter of up to two inches, and with their firm, white flesh they invite experimentation. Native Americans found them to be a source for a sweet, substantial gruel. The easiest way to obtain cattail root starch, which improves the taste and texture of any baked bread, is to filter the starch through water. Gather about five six- to eight-inch lengths of cattail root for each cup of flour in a favorite bread recipe. Prepare the roots as follows.

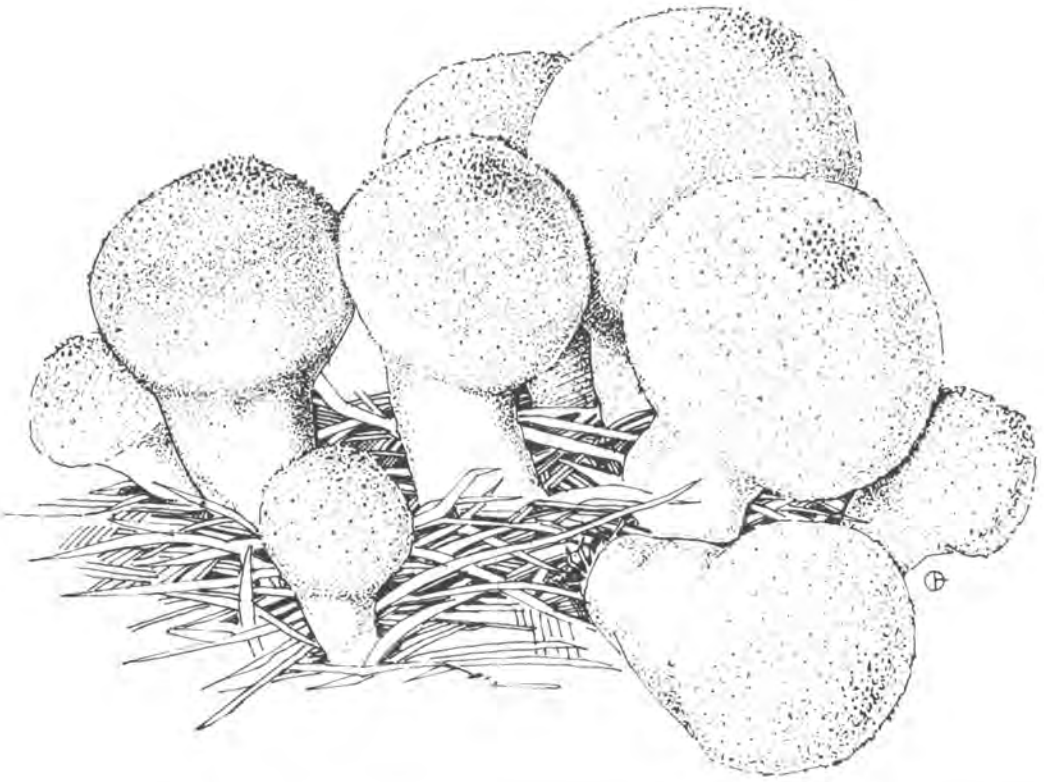
Scrub the dirt off the outside of the roots. Into a clean pot or bowl filled with water, break or slice open each root lengthwise. You can feel coagulant clusters of starch and the long fibers running lengthwise through the root. Work with the roots, trying to dislodge and dissolve the starch into the water. The fibers will stay strung to the root skin. Put the bowl of starchy water aside, and in half an hour the starch will settle. Pour off the water, add more, and work with the roots once again. You can feel the starchy results of your labor. Go at it as long as you sense more starch yet to dissolve.

The remaining thick white paste, something like cornstarch mixed with water, I add to cornbread, biscuits, waffles. You will taste and feel the difference. The cattail starch lends a smooth, glutinous consistency to them.

Winter is the best time to gather cattail roots, either for the starch or for the tasty buds of next year's stalks, edible raw or cooked. But late spring or early summer is the best time to keep watch for cattail pollen, produced by the male half of the spikey cattail flower. Take a look at the cattail inflorescence or flowering process. Often we envision the cattail as a static image, a cigar on a stick. But those flowering parts grow and change through spring and summer. First a papery sheath encloses two distinct parts, the male spike above and the green female cob, potential seedbed, beneath. Sunshine stimulates a bursting out from the male flower: bright yellow pollen parts at a touch. Those particles that escape your reach will settle on waiting female flowers, the



**CATTAILS – *TYPHA LATIFOLIA* – ARE VERSATILE; EAT THE ROOT BUDS IN WINTER, YOUNG GREEN SHOOTS IN SPRING, GREEN FLOWERS IN SUMMER.**



**PUFFBALLS – *LYCOPERDON PERLATUM* – POP UP BRIGHT WHITE, IN CLEARED PASTURELAND OR ON THE ROTTEN LIMBS OF FALLEN TREES.**

lower half of the process, triggering reformation into a tightly packed cluster of winged seeds – that cylindrical formation we commonly envision as a cattail.

You won't stop the process if you draw off a little pollen. Plenty will escape you. Carry a quart jar into which you can bend and tap the shedding stalks. Substitute cattail pollen for some part of the flour in any recipe for baking.

As you learn to use cattails, remember the millions of others on all six continents who have gathered this benign and generous plant – not only for food, but also to make building foundations, shoes, spears, walls, partitions, ropes, mats, sieves and baskets, quilts, cushions, diapers, shrouds, sleeping bags, life preservers, sound and heat insulation. Native healers found cattail flowers an external remedy for burns, wounds, and ulcers; found a tea of the leaves helpful against uterine or rectal hemorrhaging; and found the roots useful for women and animals in labor, to promote contractions and expel the placenta. A folk cure for diarrhea uses cattail rootstock, boiled in milk. It is sweet, bland, and nutritious.

## Puffballs

Sometimes a child will find, in field or forest, a little white globe. She picks it up, pinches it, poof! A gentle spray of mouse-brown dust. Puffball spores disperse like smoke or fairy glitter.

But to the autumn forager puffball spores mean edible mushrooms discovered too late for the eating. For when puffballs poof, they have already passed through their cycle of fruition. They send out spores, like seeds, for the new year's crop. Arrive a week or a month earlier, and you will be able to gather puffballs. From spring through autumn, whenever moisture conditions are right, puffballs appear. Along with morels, they are the most positively identifiable edible mushrooms around.

Puffballs pop up bright white, in rich cleared pastureland or on the rotting limbs of fallen trees. Orson K. Miller's excellent guidebook, *Mushrooms of North America* (Dutton, 1978), names 16 species. All form round white globes with hardly a stem to stand on. They feel soft and spongy, like any other mushroom. Some species fruit no larger than an apricot, while others grow as large as a melon. Age turns them brown and warty. Then a hole cracks open on top, through which the spores scatter. Mycelium (a fungus's underground root system) may remain where you find a spent puffball. Come back next summer or next autumn.

Of those 16 species, it's easy to separate the good puffballs from the four varieties that might be bitter to the palate. If a puffball is white through and through, smells good, and is big enough to bother with, you can gather it to eat. One must also always check to find the flesh uniform and patternless. Be sure you do not see the embryo of mushroom stem or gills. If you do, you may be gathering Amanita buttons and they may be deadly. Careful observation should guide you as you gather and prepare puffballs. Slice each puffball at least once down the middle to verify white uniformity. You can peel off the outer skin if it feels tough.

Puffballs can be sautéed or deep fried, or dipped in a tempura batter. For simplicity's sake, I prefer a Wild Puffball Fry. Fill a small paper bag with one cup of flour (half white, half whole wheat) and half a teaspoon of salt. Pinch in some dried herb, if you want seasoning. Toss in manageable

slices of fresh white puffball. Shake gently to coat three to four of them. Melt three to four tablespoons of butter in a skillet and fry the fungus until golden brown. Puffballs taste sweet, nutty, earthy.

North American natives gathered puffballs for eating; so did settlers traveling west. And from several tribes explorers learned that dry spores, the smoky dust of puffballs, have hemostatic properties. Indians used the dust to treat bleeding cuts and wounds, and may even have gathered it in autumn to store through the winter for treatment when needed.

## Kudzu

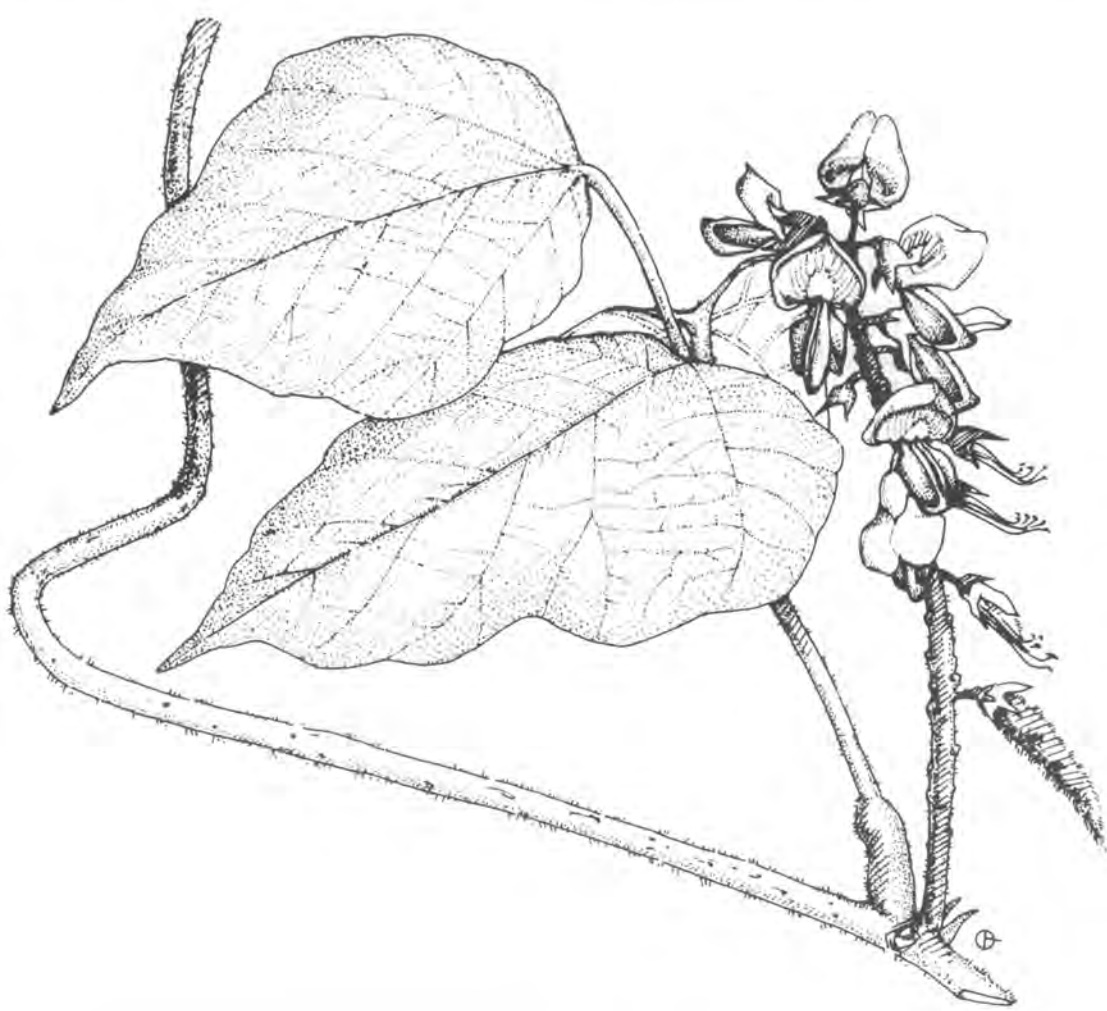
If you live in the South, you already know about kudzu. Aggressive vines creep from fields and embankments up fences, walls, and trees. Its benign-looking trefoil and fruity flowers smother the Southern summer landscape. Frost may shrivel its leaves, but an enormous underground root stores up enough energy to boost spring growth to an amazing rate of one foot per day.

Kudzu's prolific growth pattern at first won it admiration and a place on this continent. Originally imported from the Orient, it was prized as an ornamental oddity grown to shade the backyard veranda. By the 1920s and '30s Southern farmers were raising kudzu for other reasons. Farm animals devoured it, and from it they gained important nutrients. It grew in the poorest of soil, filling in gullies and eroded farmland, replenishing nitrogen to spent acreage. It took hold anywhere and seemed to help roadside and railway embankments, where no other plants would keep the dirt from sliding. Government agents and private enthusiasts set in new kudzu plants by the acre.

But over the last 20 years kudzu has lost favor with the American farmers who once praised it as a wonder plant. Kudzu has become a pest. Hard to control and difficult to eradicate, it weighs down buildings and kills the trees that support it. Thousands of dollars are now spent annually trying to wipe it out. But kudzu has a number of uses, well known in its native lands.

The plant was imported from Japan, where it grows with less abandon and where tradition appreciates it. Oriental cuisine includes kudzu – not only the leaves and flowers but also, more commonly, the starch extracted from its sizable roots. The root provides useful nutrients and has medicinal virtues as well. But no one imported Oriental recipes for kudzu when they imported the plant itself.

Recently an entire book has been published to sing the praises of kudzu. William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi's *The Book of Kudzu* (Autumn Press, 1977) shares with Westerners many



**KUDZU – *PUERARIA LOBATA* – HAS FLOWERS THAT SMELL LIKE RIPE GRAPES; THEIR TASTE COMBINES THE FLAVORS OF FLOWER, FRUIT, AND VEGETABLE.**

## WILD PLANTS

Susan Tyler Hitchcock's book excerpted on these pages is a good guide to what plant to gather when – especially for people in areas with climates similar to hers in Virginia. But it is not a field guide and doesn't solve the problem of how to identify an unknown plant found in the wild. Some suggestions for books that will help with that are: Lee Peterson's encyclopedic *Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants* (Houghton Mifflin, 1978), May Theilgard Watts's *Flower Finder* (Nature Study Guild, 1955), R.E. Wilkinson and H.E. Jaques's *How to Know the Weeds* (William C. Brown, 1972), Orson K. Miller, Jr.'s *Mushrooms of North America* (Dutton, 1978), or the relevant parts of George A. Petrides's *Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs* (Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

Clever ideas for what to do with your wild plants once you've found them are in Billy Joe Tatum's *Wild Foods Cookbook and Field Guide* (Workman, 1976).

*Native Harvests* is a comprehensive guide to the foods of American Indians, and its main emphasis is on the preparation of the wild foods native to our land. Written by Barrie Kavasch for the American Indian Archaeological Institute, it is published by Vintage Books.

Finally, not to be overlooked are the Euell Gibbons classics: *Stalking the Wild Asparagus, Stalking the Healthful Herbs, Stalking the Blue-Eyed Scallop, Stalking the Good Life*, all published by David McKay.

Eastern uses for kudzu. The authors foresee a time when "the South may come to be viewed as a treasure-trove bursting with 'white gold' just waiting to be harvested."

Kudzu is most noticeable in midsummer when, amidst its profusion of wide leaves, dangle clusters of fuchsia flowers, shaped something like sweet peas. The flowers smell like ripe grapes, and their taste combines the flavors of flower, fruit, and vegetable. Kudzu flowers, shoots, and tender new leaves are all edible, raw or cooked. Once the plant has flowered, most of its leaves become too tough to eat, even after lengthy steaming. But mark the spot; because once flowers and foliage die, kudzu roots attain their prime.

Kudzu starch is prepared by a method quite similar to the process used to extract starch from the cattail root, described above. The kudzu root is woodier, though, and fingertips do not so easily dislodge its starches. Dig up a gallon container full of kudzu roots, rinse and scrub them, then get ready for lengthy processing. Occasional attention over several days will provide you with healthful kudzu starch.

Starting with scrubbed medium-size roots (up to an inch and a half across), slice coin-shaped chunks. If you have a blender, fill it halfway with water and add the kudzu chunks a few at a time. Whiz them in the blender, and froth will rise as if you were whipping cream. If you have a food mill or meat grinder, put smaller chunks of root through or just dice the roots fine and toss them into clean water.

The extracting process, which runs over several days, requires that you add water, strain the fiber through a fine cloth, wring the cloth-caught fiber for any remaining starch, then add water to the fiber all over again. Let the starchy liquid sit in a cool place for at least two days. As with the cattail, the starch will sink to the bottom. Pour or ladle off the water, then dilute the starch with clean water once again and let it sit another day or two in the cold. Don't let it freeze. Ultimately you will produce a chunky white starch, tending toward dull brown, settling to the bottom. You can use the wet starch in soups, breads, or stews, or you can dry it on a baking sheet, in the air, or in a very slow oven, so that you can store it as dried powder.

Shurtleff and Aoyagi offer many traditional recipes for sauces, soups, desserts, and noodles using kudzu powder. While their recipes assume that you will buy packaged kudzu powder, we may as well gather and prepare our own.

Kudzu powder seems to offer medicinal qualities as well as good taste and texture in food. Its virtues must come from its extreme alkalinity. Oriental tradition prescribes kudzu root tea for stomach troubles: it soothes acid indigestion. For the tea, gather, dice, and dry the roots on a windowsill or in a very slow oven. Simmer them (perhaps with other healing roots like wild ginger or ginseng) for up to an hour, so they slowly release their powers into the water.

If more of us actually pulled up surrounding kudzu, the Southeastern landscape might be freed of its burden. Considering the abuse this plant has recently suffered, it could use our help. Many public embankments, once deliberately planted in kudzu, are now deliberately sprayed with herbicides, year after year, to kill the kudzu. Avoid those patches of kudzu which have soaked up either herbicides or engine exhaust fumes – poisons and leads that can do harm. Seek out the more secluded strands of kudzu, creeping into woods and fields and backyards unhindered. Spraying kudzu is just covering one mistake with another. We end up the worse for it, our land ravaged, nothing growing once again. Pulling up kudzu is facing the situation. Gathering kudzu is making the most of it. □

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# BILLIONS OF CHICKENS

## THE BUSINESS OF THE SOUTH

BY HOPE SHAND

*USDA photo by George A. Robinson*

The premiere agribusiness of the South is not cotton or tobacco, peanuts or soybeans, but the two-footed feathered creatures that go into Southern Fried. The Midwest can still lay claim to corn, wheat, and hogs – but the nation's chicken-basket is in the South. At least 88 percent of the nation's broilers – young chickens raised for meat – are born, raised, slaughtered, and processed here.

The total farm value of broiler production in the South is about $4 billion – surpassing all other crops as the top ranking agricultural commodity. The broiler industry employs approximately 56,000 production workers in the South and contracts with an estimated 20,500 farmers who "grow out" the birds. Commerical broilers are the region's biggest consumers of finished feed – an estimated 16.5 million tons. About five million acres of corn and soybeans will go to chicken feed in 1983.

In 1982 broilers were the number one agricultural commodity in Arkansas, Georgia, and Alabama. In North Carolina broilers are second only to tobacco. In these four states alone, the industry turned out 1.9 billion broilers with a farm value of $1.6 billion in 1982.

It took less than two decades for commerical broilers to infiltrate the South. In 1950 small flocks of chickens were kept on nine out of 10 farms in the nation. The South was poultry-deficient then, so chickens and eggs were shipped in from other areas. But not for long. By the mid-1960s, the chicken business had evolved from a sideline on the family farm to a giant Southern-based agribusiness.

Why the South? The region's mild climate provides year-round growing conditions and cheaper fuel bills for heating the houses where broilers are raised. "You also need a lot of small farmers to feed the birds, and a lack of other industry," explains Paul Alexander of Valmac Industries, an Arkansas- and Texas-based company that is the nation's seventh largest chicken producer. Broiler companies usually locate in rural areas where they can "lock in" their labor force, observes William Heffernan, a rural sociologist at the University of Missouri. "Marginal farming areas in the Southeast provide a work force which can be most easily exploited," he says.

## An Integrated Business

After several decades of fierce competition, a handful of major corporations dominate today's $12 billion broiler industry. A continuous pattern of overproduction and industry price-cutting has allowed only the largest and most diversified companies to survive in a market flooded with low-priced broilers. Small independent companies are dropping like flies. In 1960 there were 286 federally inspected broiler firms in the United States; by 1981 there were only 137. In 1982 industry analysts reported that 21 broiler firms were for sale – and eight mergers and acquisitions were recorded the same year.

Today the top 10 companies produce 51 percent of all U.S. broilers (see chart). They include diversified multinational corporations like Continental Grain and Central Soya (two of the world's largest grain companies), and Memphis-based Federal Company, one of the South's 50 largest corporations. In 1982 C-P Company, Ltd., became the nation's largest broiler corporation when a subsidiary of London-based Imperial Foods merged with a division of ConAgra. The company slaughters an average of 8.9 million broilers every week.

Chicken giants also include several "independent" corporations which are based almost entirely on poultry products. Gold-Kist is a farm co-op which ranks number 230 on the Fortune 500. Perdue Farms and Tyson Foods are personal poultry empires built and controlled by company chairmen Frank Perdue and Don Tyson.

The major broiler companies are commonly referred to as "integrators." These companies typically control all phases of producing broilers, processing the meat, and distributing the product. The farmers who raise the chickens work under contract to the integrator. Most companies own their own breeder flocks, hatcheries, feed mills, processing plants, and delivery trucks. Some corporations, like Perdue and Federal Company (Holly Farms) now sell directly to consumers in their own fast-food, fried chicken restaurants. The broiler industry boasts that it is "unmatched for efficiency in all of agriculture." The statistics are impressive:

- Annual production of commercial broilers has increased from 631 million birds in 1950 to more than 4.1 billion in 1982. Gross farm value has jumped from $533 million in 1950 to $4.5 billion in 1981.
- Chicken is one of the best bargains around – and Americans are eating it up. The price per pound has increased by only 54 percent in the past quarter-century – compared to 195 percent for beef and 188 percent for pork. In real terms, broilers cost less than half of what they did 25 years ago. The average American ate nearly 50 pounds of chicken in 1982, compared to only 23.3 pounds in 1960.

## Super Chicken

Without a doubt, the broiler industry's outstanding performance is due to its ability to breed a "better" bird and, as *Successful Farming* magazine puts it, its "obsession with wringing every last gram of efficiency out of their product."

Taxpayer-supported agricultural research at the nation's land-grant universities is responsible for new technology and rapid growth in the broiler industry. In 1981, for example, land-grant universities in 13 Southern states spent a total of $14.5 million for 312 poultry research projects.

The research runs the gamut; most projects are concerned with the effects on the birds and on production of various antibiotics, growth promoters, other food additives, light, environment, and so forth. Some are general: Mississippi State University, for example, has a project to "study the effects of light and environment on production of broiler chickens." Some are much more specialized: University of Florida scientists seek to discover whether geese will eat water hyacinths. Some are down-to-earth and practical: the University of Georgia is studying whether running fans at night will improve growth and feed conversion of broilers. The same Georgia researchers are also determining "the effectiveness of microwave radiation for brooding poultry."

Decades of such research have produced genetic manipulation on a grand scale, and the modern-day, mass-produced broiler bears little resemblance to its barnyard predecessor. A ton of chicken feed now produces 37 percent greater weight gain than in 1955. The average broiler grows from 40 grams to 2,000 grams (a 50-fold increase) in just seven weeks – less than half the time it took to grow a broiler 25 years ago. "If humans grew at the same rate," boasts a U.S. Department of Agriculture brochure, "an eight-week-old baby would weigh 394 pounds."

Today's commercial broilers are uniformly bred for rapid growth, extra-meaty breasts, and for stress resistance to withstand crowded, factory-feedlot conditions. Chickens are raised in flocks of 10,000 to 20,000 birds in a house the length of a football field and one-fourth the width. These growing conditions are the pride of the broiler industry and the scourge of the "animal rights" movement.

Recent studies indicate that the old-timey taste of chicken has been sacrificed to accommodate the commercial broilers' factory-farm environment. The massive size of a genetically uniform flock of baby chicks requires that they receive heavy doses of drugs for disease resistance and growth promotion. These drugs can alter the taste of chicken. Fifty percent of all antibiotics produced in the United States now go to animal feeds – and the poultry industry consumes a hefty share.

Unfortunately, feed additives can

USDA photo by George A. Robinson

do more than affect the flavor of chicken meat. Antibiotics in animal feed are now considered potentially hazardous to human health. A growing number of human diseases are developing resistance to antibiotics. Studies indicate that one factor responsible for this is the routine use of antibiotics in animal feed, which is passed through the feed to the chickens and ultimately to the human consumer. Exposure to these low levels of antibiotics allows human diseases to develop resistance to the drugs.

Approximately 80 million broilers are mass-produced every week. Despite the uniformity of today's commercial broilers, the advertising arm of the industry has successfully fabricated "unique" features for each company's product. The chicken on your grocer's shelf has been "branded" by the broiler industry. Over 40 percent of all broilers are now marketed under brand names, with distinctive labels like "Cookin' Good," "Gold 'N Plump," and "Young & Tender." The industry spends $25 million a year on advertising to promote its product – which is rapidly becoming a *processed* one. "Ice-packs [whole carcass broilers] are going out with the horse and buggy," predicts one industry spokesman, "There is more profit in a processed item."

When companies "further process" a chicken, they put the bird in some new form – chicken franks, breaded chicken patties, chicken fillets, and so forth – and then sell it for more than they could get for plain chicken. The extra cost is the result of adding new ingredients, labor, packaging, advertising (to teach you to prefer the processed version), and higher profit margins for the companies. At least 20 percent of the industry's products end up in fast-food and restaurant chains. Tyson Foods, a leader in processed chicken, already manufactures 450 poultry-related items.

## Down on the Factory Farm

In the broiler industry, the chicken farmer is commonly referred to as a "grower." There is no such thing as an independent family farmer in the chicken business. Ninety-nine percent of the nation's broilers are produced under contract. If a farmer wants to raise commercial broilers, he or she has to have a contract.

How does the contract agreement work? The farmer provides all the labor, land, and equipment necessary to raise the birds – and agrees to relinquish all major decision-making responsibility to the integrator. A new, fully automated chicken house costs from $60,000 to $80,000. A typical broiler farm has a capacity of 30,000 or more birds, and the grower usually receives four to six flocks a year. Farms with sales of more than 100,000 birds account for 82 percent of all broilers sold.

The integrator provides the baby chicks, feed, and medication. The company delivers the day-old chicks to the farm and picks them up seven or eight weeks later when they are three-and-a-half-pound birds. The chickens are rounded up and packed into cages by the company "chicken catchers." They are transported on company trucks and weighed on company scales.

The farmer's work is evaluated on the basis of how many birds in each flock are condemned (because of bruises or disease), and how much feed is used to grow each bird (feed conversion ratio). Since feed accounts for 75 percent of the cost of raising

chickens, the objective is to grow a big bird with as little feed as possible.

Most growers have limited contact with the companies they work for. The company "serviceman" is the link between the farmer and the integrator. He or she visits the farm to monitor the grower's performance and tells the grower when to turn on fans, medicate the birds, or fumigate the houses. The serviceman also determines if and when the grower will get a new flock of chickens. Tom Deans, a grower in Bear Creek, North Carolina, sums up his relationship with the serviceman this way: "The man has total control over me. He has no investment in my operation, but he's got complete say-so over the future of my farm."

The vast majority of broiler farms are run on family labor. One of the "incredible achievements" of the industry is that a single individual can manage huge numbers of chickens. Many growers, like most farmers these days, have other jobs in addition to the chicken houses; in many cases, they can't make it on broilers alone.

Broiler contracts vary somewhat because of weather and growing conditions, but virtually all of them have the same objective. There is no guarantee that a farmer will receive another flock of chickens beyond any seven-to-eight-week grow-out period. For the farmer, it is an enormous investment with no security. "Any mistake you make – you pay for it," remarks Fitima Groce, a Silk Hope, North Carolina, grower who has raised chickens for 12 years. "It all works to their advantage. Everything falls right back on the grower."

The contract system allows agribusiness to treat the farmers as employees – without any obligation to pay them as employees or provide them with job security. As long as the farmers are under contract, they are considered "independent" operators. The company thus has no obligation to provide health insurance, workers' compensation, paid vacation, and so on. And the industry wants to keep it that way.

As a result of a recent anti-discrimination suit against ConAgra (the nation's largest producer/processor of broilers), the industry is now considering adoption of a "model" contract that aims to protect the industry by clarifying grower status. Harold Ford, president of the Southeastern Poultry & Egg Association, explains the industry's objective: "The farmer is an independent businessman, and should not be considered an employee of the company. This needs to be put in writing."

## Hard Times

According to George B. Watts, president of the National Broiler Council, "The broiler industry has sustained during the early '80s one of its most prolonged and severe economic downturns." Even so, industry giants are not really suffering. Federal Company, Central Soya, Tyson, ConAgra, and others have reported increased earnings over the past two quarters. But chicken farmers are feeling the squeeze.

When broiler production is stable, the grower can normally expect four to six flocks of chickens every year. But during a period of overproduction the farmer is expendable. The integrator controls surplus production by giving the grower fewer flocks of birds – or by simply dropping the contract.

Statistics on the number of growers who have been forced out of business are not available. But there are other signs of hard times. Huge numbers of abandoned chicken houses have become a striking feature of the Southern landscape. Not all of them are old or outdated. Before making a loan to a new poultry grower, the Farmers Home Administration now requires that county loan officers consider "the number of farms in the area that have vacant facilities . . . or do not have a contract due to surplus production."

A 1983 budget prepared by North Carolina State University indicates that a broiler farmer with a new $62,500 chicken house and 5.5 flocks per year (100,617 birds) can expect to lose money. Nevertheless, major agricultural lending institutions are still making loans for the construction of new chicken houses. Herbert Gaines, a North Carolina-based Production Credit Association agent, describes what can happen when his office makes a loan for new facilities: "When the integrator decides to go with a new grower, he's probably going to cut someone else off. That other man who is being cut might also be one of our borrowers. It's a very difficult situation."

It is unusual for broiler growers to be free of debt. In addition to the mortgage on their chicken houses, growers are often required to install new, updated equipment at their own expense.

### THE NATION'S LARGEST BROILER PRODUCERS

| Company | Brand Names | Weekly Broiler Production |
|---|---|---|
| 1. C-P Co., Ltd. (jointly owned by ConAgra and Imperial Foods, Ltd.) | Banquet, Country Skillet, To-Ricos, Country Pride | 8.9 million |
| 2. Gold Kist, Inc. | Gold Kist, Young 'N Tender | 6.3 million |
| 3. Holly Farms (Federal Co.) | Holly Farms, Holly Pak | 5.48 million |
| 4. Perdue Farms | Perdue | 4.0 million |
| 5. Tyson Foods | Buttergold, Chick 'N Quick, Country Fresh, Delecta Ray, Honey Stung, Light and Spicy, Old American, Sandwich Mate, Ozark Fry, Patty Jean | 3.7 million |
| 6. Lane Processing | – | 3.24 million |
| 7. Valmac Industries | Janet Davis, Tasty Bird, Willowbrook Farms | 3.2 million |
| 8. Central Soya, Inc. | Paradise Valley, Pearl, Sel Pak, Sweet Georgia | 2.9 million |
| 9. Pilgrim Industries | Pilgrim's Pride | 2.5 million |
| 10. Wayne Poultry Division (Continental Grain Co.) | Wayne Farms | 2.0 million |
| 11. Foster Farms | Foster Farms | 2.0 million |
| 12. Corbett Enterprises | – | 2.0 million |

Source: *Broiler Industry* magazine and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union

"I bet you that 90 percent of the people who are growing chickens would get out of the business if they could get out of debt," insists former chicken farmer Devoy Lindley. "You're just like a dog. You follow the crumbs along, and you get poorer every day – they don't want you to get out of debt."

The Lindley family raised chickens for 40 years until they lost their contract in 1982. Lindley recalls, "I had to put in new fans that cost me $1,600. But the very next month they [the company] cut me off – and I never even turned on those fans. The fieldman [serviceman] came out and told me no more chickens. I was shocked. I thought I would be the last one it would happen to."

Broiler growers are held hostage to a system of corporate peonage. For many, there are few alternatives. Unlike contract vegetable growers, the broiler farmer does not have the option of growing a different crop. Empty chicken houses are not easily adapted to alternative production. Even conversion to turkey barns requires a huge investment and another contract. In some areas of the South, it is nearly impossible to sell a poultry farm.

"How can you sell a chicken farm? Who wants it?" asks Mary Clouse, the wife of a Chatham County, North Carolina, chicken farmer. "Especially when the banks are making loans for new ones. It keeps the farmer on his knees. We're stuck with it – what else can we do?"

## Growers' Organizing Efforts

"What we need is a poultrymen's union – where we could all get together and demand more security – but doing that would be just like putting your head on the chopping block," says one broiler grower.

Under the thumb of corporate integrators, chicken farmers have limited opportunity to organize for fair contracts, increased pay, and job security. Milton Thomas, president of the National Farmers Union chapter in Arkansas, laments, "We've been fighting the situation for a number of years. We've had special meetings [with poultry growers] but we haven't made any headway because the growers are not able to do anything. They're trapped. If they could grow birds independently, there just wouldn't be a market for their broilers. It's pretty much the same all over the South – they just don't have any control over their situation."

Nevertheless, organized groups of struggling chicken farmers are emerging throughout the South, attempting to gain a voice for growers.

Poultry Producers, Inc. (PPI) is a statewide organization of Arkansas chicken farmers which includes some 1,800 growers. PPI's former president, Pat Spangler, explains the obstacles associated with organizing: "It's even difficult to get a list of growers' names from the integrators. They don't want anyone to know who their growers are. When the integrator finds out you're trying to organize, they can put on a lot of pressure. The servicemen have a lot of influence – they're the

### THE BROILER BELT

**1982 production**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Arkansas | 668 million |
| 2. Georgia | 611 million |
| 3. Alabama | 500 million |
| 4. North Carolina | 419 million |
| 5. Mississippi | 299 million |
| 7. Texas | 223 million |
| 10. Virginia | 140 million |
| 12. Florida | 97 million |
| 14. South Carolina | 48 million |
| 15. West Virginia | 26 million |
| 23. Kentucky | 3 million |

**Total U.S. production 4.151 billion**

*Nation's top 10 producing states are shaded.*

ones who tell the grower he's going to get in trouble. The growers are very strongly intimidated. Tyson [Foods] told a lot of their growers they wouldn't get any more chickens if they joined our organization."

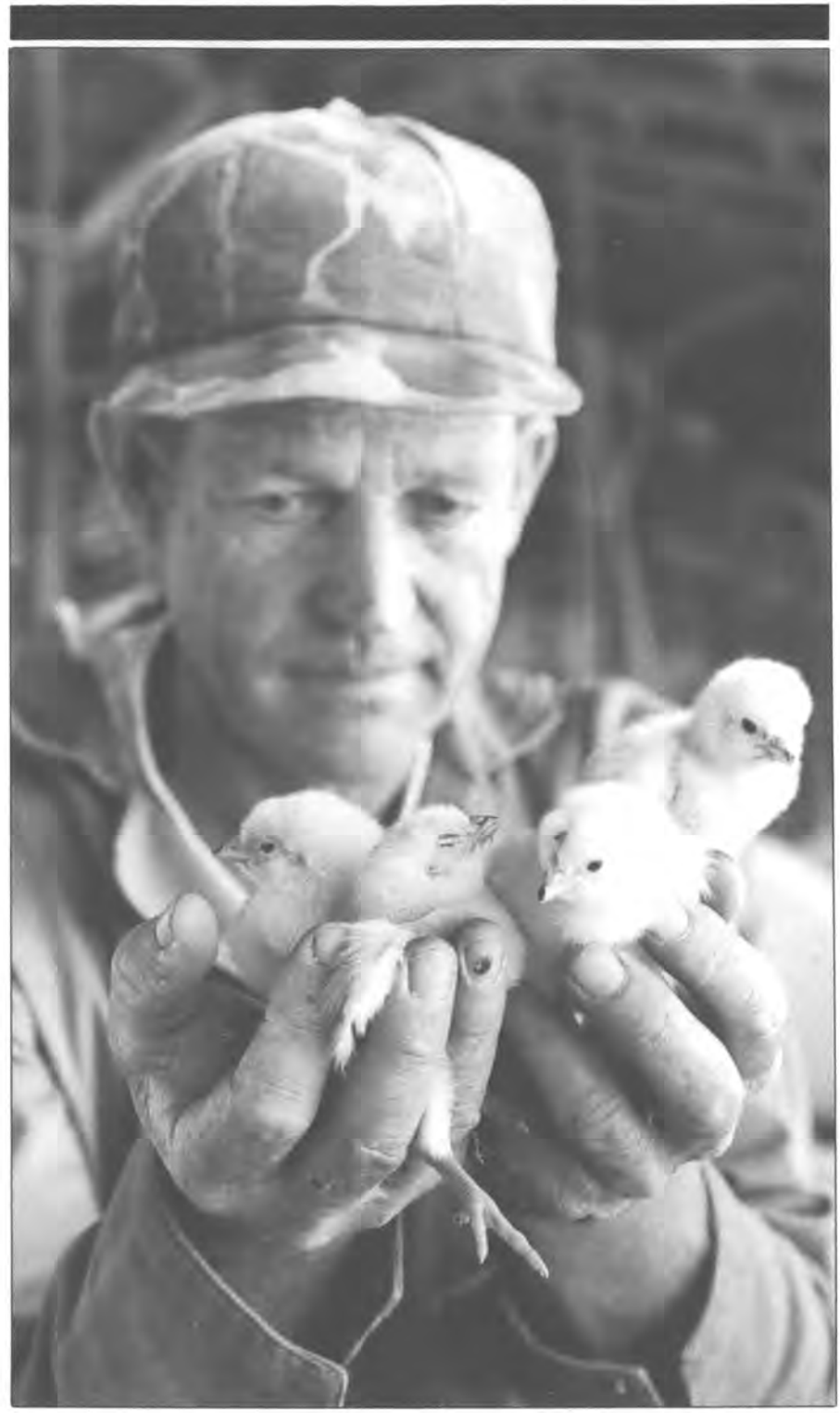
In 1981, when Valmac (then the largest integrator in Arkansas) required its growers to install new, costly fans, PPI's members resisted. As a result, Valmac began to cut back on the number of chickens allotted to its growers. But nobody lost his or her contract. Spangler believes that the growers' efforts did make a difference. "We have them [industry] a little bit worried. They are nicer and more diplomatic when they deal with the growers now – and they haven't come out with any new equipment requirements. We did enough so that industry knows we'll be better organized the next time."

In southern Alabama more than 120 chicken farmers from four counties formed the Wiregrass Poultry Growers Association in 1973. In 1980 Wiregrass Association went on strike against ConAgra, the region's largest integrator. Growers charged that the company was short-changing them on feed deliveries, requiring excessive changes in equipment, and condemning too many of the growers' healthy birds.

For almost six weeks, Wiregrass members closed their chicken houses and stopped taking the company's birds. When ConAgra officials refused to meet with members of the Wiregrass Association, the growers set up roadblocks in front of the company's plant, feedmill, and hatchery. Picket lines surrounded ConAgra's facilities. "The company wouldn't meet with the growers," recalls Wiregrass member Fred Daughtry, "but the Federal Land Bank and Production Credit Association [agricultural lending agencies] who have millions of dollars invested in this area, started to get pretty nervous. They knew we were serious."

It was the lending institutions that finally met with ConAgra. The company later agreed to give the farmers a small raise, and the strike was called off. "It wasn't really what we wanted," admits Daughtry, "but things aren't as bad now. The company has let up on us a lot and the servicemen don't harass us like they used to."

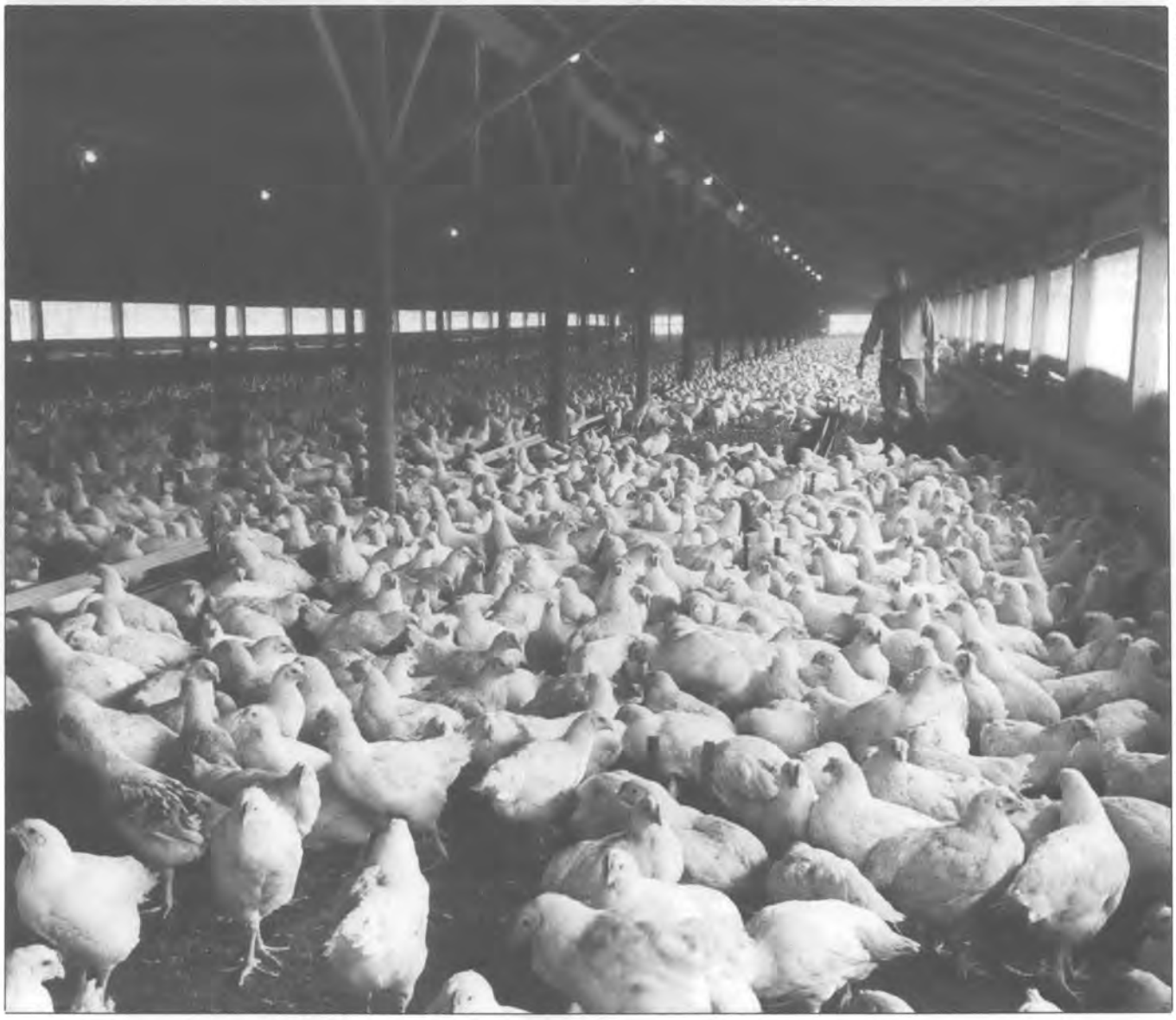
Wiregrass is less active now, but members are still exploring ways to improve the growers' situation. The organization is now trying to purchase natural gas for its members (to heat their chicken houses) at a cheaper, industrial rate.



*USDA photo by George A. Robinson*

## What Next?

What future for broiler farmers? Despite their growing numbers, organized groups of contract chicken farmers can claim only a small measure of success. But there is potential for change. A 1979 U.S. Department of Agriculture study of future trends in the broiler industry admits that increasing evidence of "producer activism . . . has possible implications for future production structure and the institutions external to it." The direction taken by organized groups, however, and their success in forming a



USDA photo

strong and unified voice for contract growers remain to be seen.

As the South's leading agribusiness, the broiler industry plays a significant role in the region's economy and the structure of Southern agriculture. The majority of the nation's small farmers, though rapidly dwindling in number, live in the South. The broiler industry has helped maintain as well as distort this longtime tradition. Vertical integration in the broiler industry has created a new breed of Southern family farmer.

Under the guise of contracting with "independent family farmers," the corporate integrators have reduced the real status of contract chicken growers to something less than that of company employees. The integrator tells its farmers how to produce chickens, in what quantity, at what times, and for what prices. For the privilege of getting and keeping a contract, growers must relinquish decision-making ability and shoulder major risks of the business – with no job security.

American consumers have traditionally benefited from bountiful supplies of relatively cheap broiler meat. But as the industry becomes increasingly concentrated and a handful of integrators dominate production, will chicken remain a low-budget item? And can broilers continue to be mass-produced in a factory-farm environment without the use of additives which pose potential risk to human health?

Despite the unparalleled efficiency of modern broiler production, the industry's structure raises serious questions for farmers, consumers, and the very future of American agriculture. As a growing proportion of U.S. crops and livestock are produced by farmers under contract to corporate agribusiness, we all have something to lose. □

*Hope Shand is director of research for the Rural Advancement Fund/ National Sharecroppers Fund in Pittsboro, North Carolina. Statistics cited in this article are from government and industry sources; exact citations are available on request.*

# RETURN TO THE JUNGLE

BY KATHLEEN HUGHES

**EVERY PIECE OF POULTRY (OR other meat) we buy has its stamp of government approval, the little seal that tells us it has been inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and found fit to eat.**

Those of us who remember our history lessons know we owe this service to Upton Sinclair, the muckraker whose expose of conditions in "The Jungle" – Chicago's packing houses – led in 1906 to the first law mandating federal meat inspection.

What is less well-known is that the Reagan administration is quietly leading a return to the jungle that threatens the safety of meat consumers once more. In the slaughter houses, USDA employees inspect every animal by hand for disease or contamination – at least in theory. But the USDA is bowing to industry pressure to speed up the production lines, allowing vacant inspector positions to go unfilled, denying public access to information about plants in chronic violation of USDA regulations, and toying with various schemes to inspect only some of the slaughtered animals.

USDA reaction to industry pressure is no surprise when one considers who is making the decisions at USDA. Agriculture Secretary John Block is a hog farmer from Illinois. His official spokesperson for meat inspection policies is Assistant Secretary C.W. McMillan, who put in 22 years as executive vice president of the National Cattlemen's Association, which fights regulations in an attempt to preserve the profitability of the declining red meat market. Also closely involved with the inspection program is Deputy Secretary Richard Lyng, who was president of the American Meat Institute from 1973 to 1979.

The law requires inspection of each carcass in a slaughter house. In the case of poultry, one inspector, with the aid of mirrors, views each side of two adjacent birds and then tells a plant employee where to trim it. Another inspector grabs each carcass, opens the abdominal cavity, and examines and handles the organs. All of that happens in less than two seconds. Inspectors have persistently complained that they cannot conduct adequate examinations at such high speeds, and many openly admit that present rates hinder their ability to spot contaminated meat.

An Alabama inspector wrote the department asking it to reconsider plans to speed things up even more: "Because the line is moving so fast, the inspector on the mirror may miss from one to five birds if he has to turn to give instructions to his trimmer. Even down the line, when he has only 35 chickens per minute, he doesn't have time to properly inspect the chickens. Try to imagine in less than two seconds you must check the heart, kidneys, lungs, liver, spleen, muscles, sex organs, and look for contamination, plus give instructions to the trimmer and make sure they are carried out.

"Before you make any decisions on this, I think you should have chicken for dinner. While you are eating your chicken remember it was USDA INSPECTED AND PASSED. The inspector may have looked at well over 6,000 chickens without a break, maybe his eyes are getting tired. . . . He may have turned to check on his trimmer and missed the bird you are eating. Which is more important, the businessman's profits, or the fact that you may be eating that one chicken in a thousand that wasn't inspected? The chicken may have . . . some liver disease, or maybe that lump you just ate was a tumor, maybe there was a little contamination inside the breast cavity, but who cares?"

New practices also affect what happens when an inspector *does* spot trouble. Although the department denies it, several inspectors told me they are no longer authorized to slow down or stop the line without permission from the "inspector-in-charge." Getting permission can take several minutes, during which the problem carcass speeds on down the line. Inspectors say this acts as a disincentive to carefully examine questionable carcasses.

"If you can't control your line speeds," says one inspector, "you can't control the product." As an example, he describes a recent day when he discovered many of the birds on his line had developed air sacculitis, a condition where the lungs fill up with a bacteria-laden, yellowish pus. The inspector says he "blew the buzzer" to alert his supervisor, but "it was 20 minutes before he got there and there was no way of catching up" with the carcasses.

In 1981 the Reagan administration began experiments with a variation on traditional inspection procedures that would allow plants to speed up the line to a rate of 85 birds a minute. An inspectors' union local in Florida filed an unfair labor practice charge against USDA, alleging that the new methods would result in lower food quality and safety. And when the first test-run took place in a Pelahatchee, Mississippi, plant, the percentage of birds rejected as unfit for consumption fell to less than 1 percent – from the typical rate of 2.5 to 3 percent. Union officials suspect that contaminated birds were slipping by undetected.

Staff shortages are another serious problem, one that exacerbates the effects of the new procedures. Hiring and budget restrictions begun by the Carter administration left the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) short-handed – with 6 to 10 percent of inspection positions unfilled in 1980 – when Reagan was elected. Since then Congress has increased the FSIS budget by 5.1 percent, but USDA has refused to fill the vacancies. As of this October there were 345 inspector vacancies.

Slaughter inspectors, by law, must be on the kill floor continuously, but inspectors of processing plants are required only to visit each plant at least once a day. In many areas supervisors are pulling processing inspectors off their regular duties to help with slaughter inspections, and the processing plants are getting short shrift. One Florida inspector described his work this way: "It's called the 'Houston Shuffle' [in honor of FSIS director Donald Houston], because you literally walk in [the plant], wave, turn around, and walk out . . . it's a dangerous dance."

Reginald Malone, a Miami inspector who has filed an unfair labor practice lawsuit over staff shortages, says he should cover only two or three plants during a normal work day, but now must travel to five or six.

Thanks to still other recent changes, information about unsafe conditions that FSIS *does* manage to uncover is not available to the public. Beginning in the early 1970s, the service began monitoring its inspection system by making surprise visits to plants and watching inspectors at work through its Program Review Branch. Between September, 1981, and January, 1982, these monitors checked conditions in 272 plants. They found adulterated or mislabeled meat in one-fifth of them and the "potential" for unhealthy products to slip past inspectors in about 71 percent. They considered it "likely" that rancid, substandard products were getting the USDA stamp of approval in 32 percent of the plants.

Shortly after the *Kansas City Star* published an expose based largely on Program Review Branch reports, the Reagan administration terminated public access to the reports and reorganized the branch into an impotent body with no enforcement capability.

A regulation issued by the Carter administration USDA, for example, required that chronic problem plants be publicly identified, and this became the branch's most powerful enforcement tool. The Reagan administration USDA rescinded the regulation.

Reviewers now make announced visits to plants instead of surprise visits, and the number of routine visits was slashed in half in 1983. In place of plant-by-plant reports, reviewers now compose summaries of "minor" violations that do not name names. Plants with "serious" violations – a category that is undefined – still merit individual reports, but FSIS director Houston tried to exempt them from the Freedom of Information Act. Steve Goldschmidt, a reporter for *Food Chemical News*, sued for release of these documents and won in a federal appeals court. But FSIS still isn't making it easy for the public to learn what's in them.

The official rationale for all these changes is, of course, letting the free enterprise system take care of itself. The Reagan administration argues that the free market will prevent meat packers from violating health and safety standards. A consumer who gets sick from eating meat, so the argument goes, won't buy that brand again. But several questions come to mind:

- Should the government willfully allow anyone to consume products inadequately examined for disease in an effort to prove an abstract theory about the invisible hand of the marketplace?
- If consumers get sick from eating contaminated chicken, how do they know where the meat originated – or even that diseased chicken was the part of the meal that made them sick?
- What of the obvious imperatives of the market? Producers and packers want to turn out as much meat as they can, as quickly as they can, even – in many cases – if this means including meat of questionable quality. Many producers will include as much as they can without risking a major scandal that will harm business. The government's role is to ensure that as much of the meat as possible is safe for human consumption. Two distinct, often incompatible, goals – which is why there is friction between inspectors and industry, and why industry wants the government to leave it alone.
- If the free market can handle the matter of meat safety, why should the government bias consumer decisions by asserting that meat has been inspected by the government? If the government is no longer guaranteeing safety, it should not mislead consumers by stamping "USDA INSPECTED AND PASSED" on packages of meat and poultry. □

*Kathleen Hughes is co-editor of* ***Environmental Action*** *magazine. This article is adapted from her report,* ***Return to the Jungle: How the Reagan Administration is Imperiling the Nation's Meat and Poultry Inspection Program****, published this year by the Center for Study of Responsive Law, where she was then a staff writer. Copies of the 63-page report are available from the Center for $6.50: P.O. Box 19367, Washington, D.C. 20036.*


photo by Bob Kasen

# THE LONG STRUGGLE

**BY KEN LAWRENCE AND ANNE BRADEN**

**MAY 1972: THE CHICKENS COME IN on a truck in coops. There's a man who hangs the chickens; they hang by both legs. Then there are the killers. They cut the necks to kill the chickens; then the blood drains out.**

*Next the chickens go into the picking room. There they go through a scalder. Then there are four or five pickers – little rubber things that go round and round, whipping the feathers off. Someone cuts the feet off. Then the chickens go to the straight line, where someone rehangs them.*

*First thing after the chickens are on the straight line, they cut the oil bags off at the tail. Next, there's the buttonhole cutter. That's the person who cuts the hole in the butt of the chicken so people down below can pull the guts out.*

*The gut pullers get paid more money than other workers. The company seems to think they have a more strenuous job than everybody else. But if you work in a chicken plant one time, you'll agree, ain't nothing in that plant that's easy.*

*After the gut pullers, there's the government inspectors. They inspect the chickens for broken wings, broken legs, bruises, everything. The people who work next to the inspectors are called trimmers. They trim off the bad parts.*

*Behind inspectors and trimmers there's the liver and heart cutters. They cut the liver and heart off the gut of the chicken and drop them into running water. Next are the gizzard splitters. They have to cut the guts and stem out of the chicken, and split the gizzard.*

*Then the neck cutters cut the chickens twice up around the neck, and cut the head off. After the neck cutters, craw pullers have to reach up, pull down on the neck and reach up around the wings, and pull the craws and windpipe out of the chicken.*

*After that, there's the gun runners. They have to suck the lungs out of the chickens with the guns – they call them lung guns. That's like a vacuum cleaner.*

*After the chickens go through a chiller, some more folks rehang them on the packing line. One person cuts the neck all the way off. Others stuff them with giblets, and they get wrapped.*

*The chickens that were pulled off the straight line because they had marks or bad parts trimmed off go to the cut-up line. Some people cut legs off, some the wings, some split breasts. The cut-up line works until everything gets caught up, no matter how late they have to stay at night.*

*Often, the workers won't even get four- or five-minute breaks. The foreman will come looking for them in the bathrooms and break rooms. These are some of our problems. Some other poultry plants do things a little different, like giving vacation pay, but almost every job is the same.*

This description of life on the line is a composite of interviews with Merle Barber, David Nicks, and Estella Moore, who worked at Poultry Packers, Inc., in Forest, Mississippi. Poultry processing has changed in the 11 years since they spoke – some of these jobs have been mechanized, some have been eliminated by automation. But suffering continues, as does danger to the workers.

Before the 1950s, chickens were barnyard animals that made their way to the markets before they were cut up and packaged. Now broiler chickens go from hatchery to breeding farm

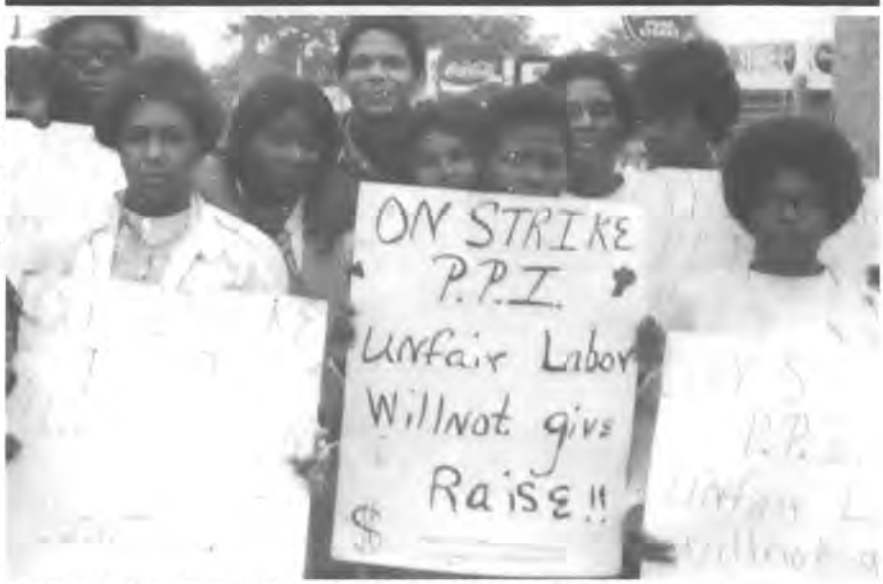



photo by Ken Lawrence

**POULTRY WORKERS STRUCK IN FOREST, MISSISSIPPI, 1972.**

to growing farm to processing plant in about two months.

As chicken-processing became concentrated in factories, the poultry industry drifted South. Here costs were lower, both because the climate was favorable for year-round operations with low overhead, and because the movement of people out of agricultural work furnished a pool of cheap labor. Centered at first in Georgia, the broiler industry spread to every Southern state and hit its stride in the mid-'50s.

From the beginning, the people who processed the chickens in small plants that dotted the Southern region worked under very oppressive conditions for very low pay – and they still do.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, almost one-fourth of the work force in the poultry industry suffers each year from industrial injuries. In the course of a three-year period, three out of four workers in a plant are hurt. And wages are low – less than two-thirds of the food industry average, which is itself below average. Through the years, the workers have engaged in recurring struggles to organize, but thus far each effort has resulted in disappointment.

In the early years, poultry workers were mainly white. Many also continued working in agricultural occupations; this was their first factory experience. Almost none had any acquaintance with labor unions, and what they had heard about them was negative. By the mid-'50s, the CIO's last big push to organize the South – Operation Dixie – had failed. Starting as a great crusade immediately after World War II, in its first year and a half this drive increased Southern union membership from 400,000 to 800,000. But the campaign fell victim to the anti-communist hysteria that split the CIO in the late '40s; unions that were in the forefront of Southern organizing – and had the greatest commitment to combating the racism that had traditionally divided Southern workers – were among those expelled and destroyed by the CIO. As they went under, the Southern drive lost its fervor. Operation Dixie was over long before the CIO officially terminated it in 1953.

But despite all the difficulties, turbulence developed among poultry workers. The response of plant owners was to threaten to replace white workers with blacks. And in fact, that is exactly what they did, gradually during the 1960s – while placing whites in every important managerial post, leaving some whites in production, and encouraging racial division.

The first stage of unionization was pursued in metropolitan areas by older unions – the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen and the United Packinghouse Workers (which later merged and exist today as the United Food & Commercial Workers Union, AFL-CIO). But wages remained low and conditions poor. Sometimes out of embarrassment at their inability or unwillingness to fight for these members, the unions would suspend their constitutions to permit lower dues for poultry workers.

It is thus not surprising that the second stage of struggle among these workers erupted outside the labor movement's mainstream and drew on a different tradition – that of the Civil Rights Movement. This thrust was initiated by black workers.

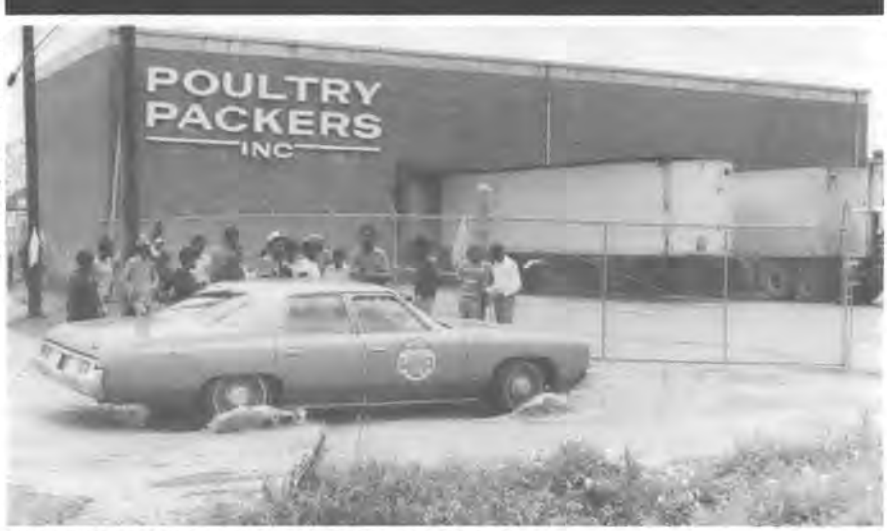



photo by Ken Lawrence

**THE PICKETS WERE UP AT PPI FOR SIX MONTHS.**

On May 10, 1972, 60 workers walked off their jobs at Poultry Packers, Inc., in Forest, Mississippi, in Scott County, the heart of the state's poultry industry. As David Nicks told it:

*Everybody was working long hours. We were breaking down*

# WHY WE NEED THIS UNION

*Jeffery May, a white woman who worked in a Forest, Mississippi, chicken plant in 1972, talked to Ken Lawrence a year later about why she joined the Mississippi Poultry Workers Union.*

I've worked in chicken plants about 15 years. I always wanted a union to come to a plant where I worked, but it never was allowed before. I felt like we needed help. I voted for the union, and we won.

Some of the whites said that if the union got in they wouldn't let nobody white work down there, that it would be all colored. Then I went to the union meeting and saw it was altogether different than what they told me. I figured the ones in the office had the boss men tell them things that wasn't true.

When I joined the union, I didn't have no problems with no colored people, but I did with some white people. I'd go in the break room, and when I'd start to sit down at the table I could see them whispering. I'd sit right by some of them, and they wouldn't say a word to me.

I thought those were my friends. But I just went on, because I knew I was right, and they were wrong. I mean I like to have friends, but I like to be right too.

Most of the white people voted against the union. But now a lot of them thinks it's all right. They was probably scared before. This is the first time white people and colored people have been going to meetings together around here, as far as I know. At first I felt a little strange, but I knew I was right.

We really needed this union. As long as I have worked, I've never had a vacation. Anybody that's got kids, if they're sick or something, can't help but miss. Then you don't know if you'll get your job back.

I had to be off for a week at Christmas when my baby sitter was sick. My job was trimming. And when I went back, they wouldn't let me trim. That's the only job that you can sit down a little while. So I lost that because my sitter got sick. I don't have nobody else to take care of my kids. There ain't no nursery around here.

We run about 90,000 chickens a day. On a short day it's about 60 or 70,000. Those days, they send us home early. We don't know until we get there if it's going to be a short day.

Sometimes we can get a break, and sometimes we can't. To go to the toilet, someone has to relieve you. If they can't, then you just have to stay there.

So there are lots of reasons why we needed this union.

*– from* ***The Southern Patriot,*** *May, 1973*

*half the day sometimes, and we got tired of it. If we're going to stay down here all day, we figured we should get paid for it.*

*We'd been hollering about vacations for a long time. But there wasn't any kind of organization. One day on a breakdown, that's when it started. Everybody was mad. It was about 7:30 in the morning, when we were supposed to start to work. The chickens were already on the line. But nobody went to the line.*

*From then on, everybody stayed in the break rooms and the bathrooms. When the white folks went back to the line, some of the black folks went to the line because they didn't know exactly what was going on. But later, after they found out, they came out and joined us.*

*You might say we just got stirred up with the whole thing that day.*

By the end of their first day on the picket line, they won a raise for workers at Gaddis Packing Company across the street – whose owner (the mayor of Forest at the time) feared workers in his plant might follow the Poultry Packers example – but none for themselves.

This was only the second strike in the history of Forest. The first took place six months earlier when local woodcutters joined the Gulfcoast Pulpwood Association (GPA) and, assisted by organizers from the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), won important gains from the giant paper trusts.

During the chicken strike, the workers organized the Mississippi Poultry Workers Union (MPWU). They rejected affiliation with the Amalgamated Meatcutters after learning that the AFL-CIO union wouldn't give them control of their own local.

MPWU asked for and received strike support from the NAACP, the GPA, SCEF, the Delta Ministry, and other civil rights groups. Some white workers joined the union, as had others during the woodcutters' struggle. (See the box above).

After six weeks on the picket line, MPWU won, and shortly thereafter gained recognition in a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election. The union was then certified as the bargaining agent in all three chicken plants in Forest – Poultry Packers, Gaddis Packing, and Southeastern Poultry. Union members began reaching out to other Scott County workers and became a force in the community by promoting day care and other social services for everyone. And MPWU leaders Merle Barber and Mathew Nicks inspired audiences of civil rights and labor activists across the country.

Although their initial demands were won (25-cent-an-hour raises, breakdown pay, vacation pay, and break time), the MPWU was unable to secure enforceable contracts. Conditions remained very bad.

Long after winning the strike, MPWU president Merle Barber described the suffering on her job as a craw-puller: "Sometimes a bone will stick in your finger. That finger turns black, and your hand swells up so. And then if you continue to pull, at night you can't sleep, and you can't comb your hair or anything. It's an awful feeling."

Had the 1972-73 upsurge caught on, it might have swept the industry, perhaps even spreading to other industries. But that wasn't to be. Although the companies could never return to the earlier conditions,


photo by Bob Kasen

**POULTRY WORKERS STRUCK IN LAUREL, MISSISSIPPI, 1979.**

eventually attrition and turnover left only the union's memory.

This relatively small group of workers, isolated in one Mississippi county, simply did not have the resources to consolidate gains there, much less reach out. Civil rights groups gave what support they could but were themselves weakened in that period by a series of attacks. Leaders of existing unions lacked the creativity and vision to incorporate MPWU's model into their conception of organizing. And by then, it was becoming apparent that Southern workers, especially those in small isolated plants, would be able to organize successfully only by combining union methods and resources with the total community organizing approach of the Civil Rights Movement, exemplified in the MPWU spirit.

It was not until 1979 that another upsurge of militancy arose in the poultry industry. This too happened in Mississippi – in Laurel, where workers at Sanderson Farms poultry plant belonged to the International Chemical Workers Union, AFL-CIO (ICWU). Temporarioy, ICWU seemed to capture a vision of the winning strategy for Southern workers.

Laurel is in Jones County, which incorporates the worst and best in Mississippi history. The county was long the center of the state's Ku Klux Klan and home of some of the killers of three civil rights workers in 1964. But Jones was also a county that seceded from the Confederacy during the Civil War; workers at its giant Masonite plant withstood Klan opposition to organize a union in the 1940s, and it was the center of biracial woodcutter organizing in the early '70s.

In 1979, 200 Sanderson workers – mostly black women – struck against what they called "plantation conditions": pay just over the minimum wage, no regular hours, unsafe conditions, no seniority or regular vacations or pension plan, and above all, a denial of human dignity. They said sexual harassment was rampant; the plant manager was one of those charged (although later acquitted) in the 1960s murder of black leader Vernon Dahmer. "They treat us worse than the chickens," one worker said.

An ICWU international staff member, Bob Kasen, provided the link with wider movements. At the outset he realized that 200 Mississippi workers could not win alone, and he immediately sought support from civil rights groups – the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Equal Rights Congress, Southerners for Economic Justice, SCEF, Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice, and others. They all responded.

On February 2, 1980, when a broad coalition brought 10,000 people to march in Greensboro, North Carolina, to protest the murder of anti-Klan demonstrators, Kasen was there. "This is what we need in Laurel," he told organizers of that march. The result was the formation of a Committee for Justice in Mississippi, a coalition led by ICWU which eventually involved leaders from 175 national and 67 Mississippi organizations – labor, civil rights, women, and church organizations.

"This is the coalition we've been waiting for," said one long-time activist. On May 7, 1980, the coalition sponsored a march that brought several thousand people to Laurel – black and white, unionists from dozens of locals across the South, representatives of all the varied constituencies. This and other activity brought national media attention to the Sanderson struggle; support committees grew across the country, and Sanderson management felt compelled to insist publicly that conditions really were not so bad. The pressure was


photo by Carolyn Mugar

**LAUREL, 1980.**

having an effect.

But soon after the march, despite intense opposition from Kasen, ICWU pulled the rug out from under the coalition. The Mississippi Federation of Labor leadership never supported the coalition – perhaps embarrassed at their own inactivity on behalf of Sanderson workers, although the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department and a number of international unions supported the march, some labor leaders brought great pressure on ICWU officers to call it off. But ICWU leaders withstood this pressure and were pleased by the march. Soon afterward, they moved to consolidate their links to the Civil Rights Movement by going to Wrightsville, Georgia, to march with SCLC during an intense struggle for black rights there. "I've never been so proud of our union as I am today," one ICWU leader said in Wrightsville.

But they were apparently frightened by the magnitude of what they had started. A civil rights organizer told one ICWU leader: "You've made history by launching what the South has long needed. You've got a tiger by the tail, and you must not let go."

The tiger proved to be too much. ICWU never called another meeting of the coalition. When other participants insisted on a meeting in August, 1980, ICWU leaders came – graciously thanked those assembled for what they had done, said the coalition was no longer needed, and disbanded it.

Without the union's cooperation, the coalition could not continue; Sanderson workers needed union support on whatever terms they could get it. Activity waned, support committees fell apart, a proposed boycott of Sanderson's Miss Goldy chickens (widely sold in supermarkets) never got off the ground, and national attention turned away from Laurel.

In January, 1981, NLRB ruled that Sanderson must rehire those who struck, and some workers went back – under the same conditions that prevailed in 1979. Since then, all but five strikers have been fired on a variety of pretexts and provocations. Those five have stopped paying dues, feeling the union has abandoned them. Plant conditions, they say, are worse than ever. An international ICWU official recently said: "The situation is dead. Even if we win all the legal victories, it's a Pyrrhic victory. There is just no activity left."

One striker who is still in the plant continues to hope. She said recently: "There was a time for the Civil Rights Movement; someday there'll be a time for us too."

Maybe, but it is more likely that the time for poultry workers – and all workers in the South's small, low-wage factories – will come only when the dream that was grasped briefly in Laurel is finally achieved: a lasting coalition of the black freedom movement, the workers' movement, and their natural allies in community groups, women's organizations, and the churches. □

*Ken Lawrence, formerly staff writer for the* ***Southern Patriot****, is a long-time Mississippi activist, researcher, and writer. Anne Braden is a journalist who has been active for more than three decades in Southern movements for social justice. The two italicized interviews included here originally appeared in the* ***Southern Patriot****, the old SCEF newspaper, in 1972. They were conducted by Ken Lawrence.*

photo by Carolyn Mugar


**A BROAD COALITION MARCHED IN SUPPORT IN LAUREL, 1980.**

# SNOWBIRD GRAVY

## STORIES TOLD TO PATSY MOORE GINNS

*In the early years of this century, the women and men of the Southern mountains were poor, but their lives were rich. They have as much – or more – to teach us about self-reliance as anyone: they used what their land provided and very little else. Here four of them recall some of the old ways with food.*

*Illustrations by J.L. Osborne, Jr.*

### DISHPAN PIE

You know, we didn't have no cans to can nothing in. We dried our blackberries. And in the winter, we'd take those dried blackberries and make 'em into a pie, just the same as if they were fresh. Put 'em in a pan, put some water and let 'em go to boiling; then put your bread in, your dough. And that was good!

And peaches.

Peaches was the finest things dried, you know.

People enjoyed eating then more than they do now.

Oh, my goodness,
I guess they did!
They worked harder,
and they enjoyed their food more.

I'd bake dried apple pies, tarts, fried apple pies. In some things, I believe the big old iron pots give the food – some of it, anyway – a better flavor. Now, where they boiled cabbage – you know, put a big bone of meat in and boil cabbage – now, that was really good! We had cornbread with it.

And soup beans! I used to have half-a-bushel of soup beans. Those were the white beans you grow, and the hulls were tough, and you shelled 'em. People would make great big old potfuls of stews, soups.

And when I had my children at home, you know, I'd make a pie in a dishpan. One of the smaller dishpans, you see. Crust on the bottom and a crust on the top. Now, that I baked in the oven, after we had an oven.

*– Iowa Patterson, born 1881*

### SNOWBIRD GRAVY

And, you know, back when we growed up, years ago, just kids and all, we'd catch snowbirds. You know what snowbirds is. And we'd clean 'em up, put 'em in the pot, and make gravy out of 'em. Oh yeah! Makes as nice a pot of gravy as you've ever seen if you get enough of 'em.

So we'd take a barn door. You know, just take a door off of a barn, put a trigger under it, and put a string to it. Just hide it in the barn.

Then we'd just put all kinds of oats and stuff under there, and when 15 or 20 got under it, we'd jerk the string. Then we'd go get 'em and have enough to make a pot of gravy.

So there was an old man stayed right close to us. His wife was about blind. Couldn't see. And he was a-gettin' some too, you know. He caught a couple. Just got two and said to her, "Now, you make some gravy for me out of these for breakfast."

Well, we had these old pothooks, you know, across the bar that you'd hang the pots on. And then you'd put 'em in there in hot water, boil 'em, and make your gravy and all.

So she couldn't see, and she went in to put the birds in the pot. And she pitched 'em over behind the backstick. And so she worked and kept a-boiling this water, and the birds over there behind the backstick.

And, I don't know, me and Dad went down there for something that morning. We'd done got breakfast. Went down there a little late, and they was a-eatin' breakfast.

And the old man, he was a-dippin' in there, and he said, "Mary, this snowbird gravy is awful weak. It's terrible weak. I just don't believe there's no snowbirds in it."

She said, "Yeah, I put 'em in it."

He said, "I just don't believe there is any in it. Honey, I just can't find any. Mary, I don't believe they're in it."

She said, "I throwed 'em in last night."

He went back and looked, and they was in behind the backstick, back in there. That got him. He was eatin' his gravy off of snowbirds, and there wasn't any snowbirds in it.

Well, now, you have a backlog. That's to throw the heat out of the fireplace. Then you put your other fire here, you see, and she had throwed 'em behind that backlog. See, it's a green one, bigger than the rest of 'em. About a 10 or 12 inch one.

A snowbird, I'd say it'd be about an inch and a half through. There wasn't much to it, just the breast, but it was

# AND DISHPAN PIE

good. What it was was real good.

Then we'd take a stick and put it in 'em. We'd kill 'em, we'd go out and kill 'em and dress 'em and then take and put a stick in 'em and take and hold 'em before the fireplace and put salt on 'em and broil 'em. Pull 'em off and eat 'em.

You just about had to survive on what you could get, you know. I can go out in the woods right now. I can take my rifle and my little old 'seng hoe that I dig herbs and stuff with and put me in the woods, and I can – no bread nor nothing – and I can live all through the summer without ever comin' in to the store for a bite of anything.

Take me a fish hook; stuff like that. See, if you come to a groundhog hole or a ground squirrel that's went in the hole, you know you can't get it out.

Just go get you a bucket. Get you some water and just start pouring water in the hole. Pour the water till the hole comes full and starts runnin' out, and get you a club and stand there.

It's a-comin' out. You know it's a-comin' out. So just knock 'im in the head, dress 'im out, and there you go!

And if you come to a rabbit hole, and it won't come out, just go to pouring water in the hole.

There's many ways to survive without just going out here and gettin' it easy. I've done a many a one that way. Just stand there with my stick, and when it pokes its head out, bust it! Get him for my meat, you know.

Us boys, we'd go out and camp that way, maybe, for two weeks. Just for the fun of it. Kill groundhogs and eat 'em; kill rabbits and eat 'em. Stuff like that.

Now, a groundhog, all that greasy part you cut out and throw away. Just get the parts you want. Get them kernels out under the four legs. You've got kernels there that big and if you cook 'em, ain't nary dog can eat one. It'll stink and run you out of the house. Cut all them out. Cut these ribs off; throw 'em away. Get all the fat off.

Cook it about two hours, two to three hours. Then pour all this water off and put it in a pan after you get to the house, and put it in the stove. Bake it. Just strip them big pieces off!

'Coon is the best meat I ever eat. That's better than groundhog.

Dad used to, we used to 'possum hunt a lot. You could sell the hides for 25 cents apiece. Polecats [skunks], they'd bring about two and a half. We'd trap 'em, catch 'em. That's the way we'd have to do to get a little bit of change.

So Dad would 'possum hunt, bring 'em in. And he'd say, "Boys, let me have that one to fatten up." So he'd feed 'em milk and bread for about two or three weeks. And then kill 'em. And you talkin' about something to eat, son, they was good! They was tender and good; they was better than chicken.

*– Stanley Hicks, born 1911*

**APPLEPEEL PIE**

Apples were scarce one year. Real scarce. My grandmother had a half bushel of apples. She canned the apples, and then she taken the peelings and canned those. Washed 'em real clean and canned 'em.

My mother said, at the time, "I'll never eat those." But then later on, she was down in the hayfield, and when she came in, my grandmother had baked two wonderful pies from those peelings. And my mother ate three pieces.

They used so many things that we throw away. I remember Grandmother peeled the potatoes real deep and planted the peelings. Raised our potatoes that way!

*– Winnie Biggerstaff, born 1904*

**THE SPRINGBOX**

We used to keep the milk and the butter in the springbox. Everybody had a spring, near about. And they had a little trough coming down through the springhouse. The water would run in a little trough.

And you'd put your butter and milk down in there to keep it cool. And if you had a well, you could tie a rope on it and let it down in the well to keep it cool. Let it down 20, 30, 40, feet to get it down where it would stay cool.

But in the spring, see, this spring water was usually around 55 degrees, and it'll keep milk and butter for several days at that temperature.

*– Ralph Crouse, born 1922*

*Patsy Moore Ginns collected these stories for her second book of oral histories,* ***Snowbird Gravy and Dishpan Pie: Mountain People Recall.*** *She has taught school in the Carolinas and Alaska, and lives in western North Carolina on the farm where her father was born.*

# RAISE LESS CORN AND MORE HELL

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM HIGHTOWER

BY GEOFFREY RIPS AND LINDA ROCAWICH

*photo by John Spragens, Jr.*

Everyone, it seems, has noticed that the prices we pay for food continue to creep higher and higher, and that it isn't farmers who are getting rich at our expense. Supermarket prices have gone up by nearly 40 percent since 1979, while net farm income has fallen by 50 percent. Not everyone, though – in fact, only a handful of activists – has said much about what we can do to change things.

For well over a decade now, Jim Hightower has not only been one of those who knows who is getting rich – as he says, "Conglomerates in the middle are skinning farmers and consumers alike" – he's also had the ideas and energy to do something about the "gougers." Last year he got himself elected Commissioner of Agriculture for the state of Texas, defeating the incumbent commissioner in the process. He has been in office since January, and the time is coming when it will be fair to examine the record for results.

After all, it was *his* campaign literature that said: "Just because the national government is abandoning the family farm doesn't mean that our state government has to sit on its hands and let it happen. A Commissioner of Agriculture can make a difference . . . if he wants to! After all, he has a $16 million annual budget, more than 500 employees, 28 field offices, 47 laws to work with, and a national platform to fight from. You ought to be able to do a job with that."

In fact, the record so far is promising, but first some background is in order. Hightower, now 40, grew up in the Red River Valley town of Denison, where his family owns the Main Street News Stand. After college at North Texas State – and the student body presidency – he was off to Washington as an aide to then Senator Ralph Yarborough, the beloved champion of Texas progressives.

Following Yarborough's 1970 defeat by Lloyd Bentsen, Hightower stayed on in Washington, founding the Agribusiness Accountability Project to expose and battle corporate control of the food business in much the way that Ralph Nader and other consumer activists were beginning to expose and battle corporate control of other aspects of our lives. That period produced two highly regarded books. *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times,* co-authored with Susan DeMarco, documents the state of agricultural research

at the land-grant colleges, where the needs of the small family farmer are virtually ignored in favor of conglomerate agribusiness. *Eat Your Heart Out* tells "how food profiteers victimize the consumer" and is dedicated to Mary E. Lease, the populist orator who advised farmers in 1892 to "Raise less corn and more Hell."

After an interlude to manage Fred Harris's 1976 campaign for president, Hightower came home, becoming editor of the *Texas Observer* in January, 1977, where he devoted two-and-a-half years to investigative reporting and political journalism advocating the rescue of ordinary Texans – whom he likes to call the "gougees": workers, consumers, family farmers, and small independent business owners – from the monopolistic corporations.

The politician in him surfaced in the fall of 1979, when he announced his candidacy for a seat on the Texas Railroad Commission, the state agency that regulates oil and gas production and pipelines, gas utility rates, trucking, buses, railroads, and strip mining. He lost that bid to an incumbent commissioner backed by the money and power of the industries the Railroad Commission regulates, but he made a strong showing. Many political observers at the outset dismissed his bid as a predictable Texas-liberal kamikaze effort, but Hightower was building new coalitions to transform state politics, and he took 48 percent of the vote.

He waited a year, continuing his organizing efforts, and announced for Agriculture Commissioner in the fall of 1981. It was a race to which he could bring not only the new, now stronger, coalitions but also the credentials of a man clearly qualified for the post.

## AGRICULTURE IS SECOND ONLY

to oil and gas in the Texas economy, generating nearly $10 billion a year in direct farm sales, with the total food economy (including shipping, processing, and retailing) generating some $37 billion in sales and employing one out of every five workers. But family farmers and ranchers are not prospering in the midst of this wealth.

Hightower says agribusiness control of the marketplace is largely to blame. "We are facing the worst economic situation in agriculture that we have had in the last 50 years. For the last four years in a row, net farm income in Texas has fallen. Last year the average cost of producing every major commodity in Texas exceeded the average price that our producers received for them. For example, it's costing $6.40 to produce a bushel of wheat on the average in Texas, yet the price farmers get for wheat is hovering around $3.40. Our rice producers are getting eight to nine cents a pound for rice that costs them more than 13 cents to produce. The same disastrous relationship between cost and price prevails in every other major commodity we produce, from citrus to cotton, from grain sorghum to goats.

"Not surprisingly, 75 percent of the 25,000 Texas farmers who have operating loans from the Farmers Home Administration presently are delinquent in their payments, which is the highest delinquency rate in the country. The same is true of farmers and ranchers operating under loans from private banks. . . .

"Of course, as anyone who goes to the supermarket knows, consumer prices for food continue to rise, and money *is* being made in the Texas food economy. . . . The problem is that farmers and ranchers are not getting a fair share of the food dollar. Historically, in good times, the farmer gets somewhere around 40 cents out of every dollar that the consumer lays down for food at the supermarket, but farmers presently are getting only about 28 cents of that dollar. Those few pennies make a mighty big difference – for example, had American farmers gotten a dime more out of each food dollar consumers spent last year, rather than middlemen taking the extra dime, gross farm income would have been $28.5 *billion* higher. That dime means the difference between bankruptcy and prosperity for American farmers, and we've got to help them restore some balance to the marketing system so they are getting a greater share of the food dollars that consumers spend."

Hightower's answer is to move farmers into the marketing stage of the food delivery system. His promise to start direct farmers' markets all over the state is among the first he has begun to fulfill.

"It could be a boon to small farmers," Hightower said in a recent interview. "It gives them a market they now don't have. I don't mean just

**JIM HIGHTOWER IN HIS NEW OFFICE OVERLOOKING THE TEXAS CAPITOL.**

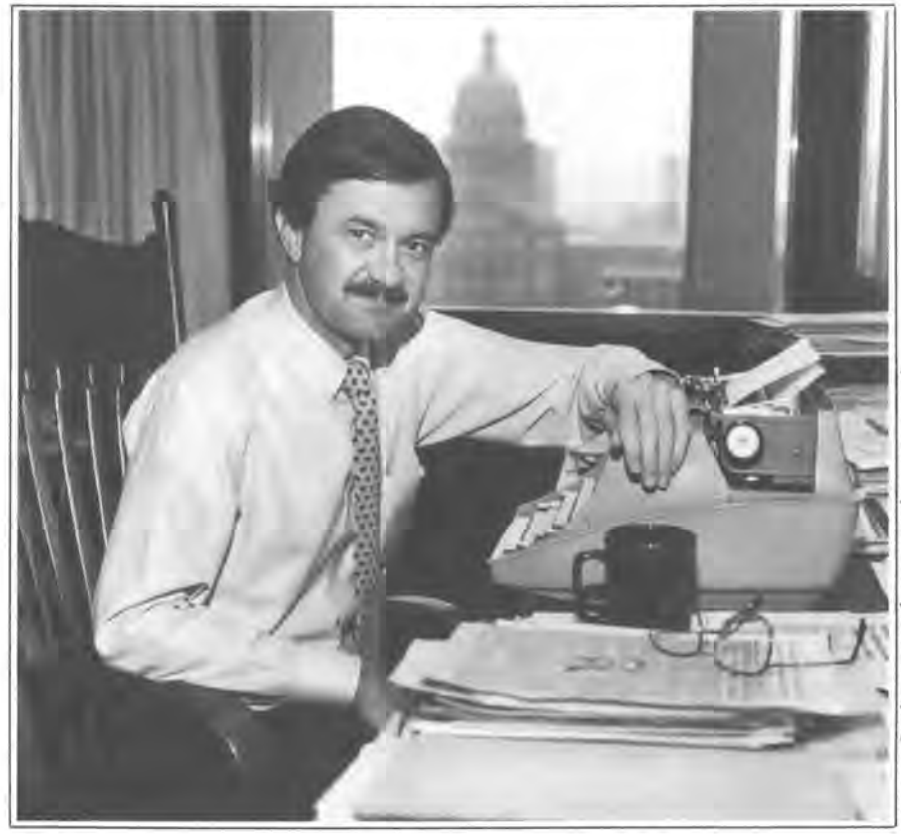


*photo courtesy Texas Department of Agriculture*

an additional market. In the case of a lot of small farmers, it gives them the only market they will have. You've got thousands of producers in Texas, especially minority producers but also a whole lot of Anglos, who have no market. You can't go to the Dallas wholesale center and get into it. You may grow the best field of tomatoes in the country, but you're not going to get your tomatoes into that market and into the supermarket bins.

"What we're doing is creating an additional competitive marketing channel through which those farmers can reach consumers, in which the farmers get a better price than they would get, if they could, in a wholesale market, and the consumers get a better price than they would get at the supermarket and good quality since it's locally grown. And all of the money stays in the local economy.

"The farmers' market idea is the single most popular thing that we're doing. We did not think that we would have any of them in operation this year. But we hired a guy out of Tennessee, John Vlcek [founder and former director of the Agricultural Marketing Project there], to come in, and working with Susan DeMarco, who's head of our marketing and agricultural development program, they got it going. Local support was very strong, even though we didn't have the program moving until mid-April, which is very late to start a farmers' market for the simple reason that the farmers have to already be producing for that market. They've got to have their plants in the ground. But the local demand was so strong that four of them were in place this year.

"In Tyler more than a hundred farmers and thousands of consumers showed up on opening day. That was the most successful. We now have outfits like Rouse developers, who do shopping centers, who want farmers' markets on some of their shopping center parking lots. They'll do it free. They'll help promote it. We get calls from county judges, city councils, mayors. It is an enormously popular idea.

"Our job is to do it right. You can sprout a whole bunch of farmers' markets in a hurry, and they'll fail. You've got to have the farmers organized to produce for it and keep them from reaching for too much too soon. The thing that can kill a farmers' market is if the consumers come and there's not much there. Then they won't come back. So the farmers have got to be there with good variety, good prices, with Texas products.

"We're also looking at organizing some of these small farmers and farmworker cooperatives into producing for more than one market. In other words, people in the Rio Grande Valley – obviously they've got citrus that's not going to be produced in Tyler or Waco or any place like that – they could use a truck cooperative, which they've got down there, and ship to our other farmers' markets. So it's still farmers selling at other farmers' markets. We've helped organize some farmers over in DeLeon, Texas, to produce for Dallas and Fort Worth wholesale markets, to market in volume by pooling their commodities. That's an old-time vegetable producing area that has not produced vegetables in recent years because they haven't had a market. Now they can go back to doing it.

"It creates a whole new economic sector in the marketplace. This isn't government money going in. It's a cooperative venture between private individuals, producers, and the state as packager. That's all we are. We just help open it up. We don't own any of these markets. We don't run them. They form councils and the local people run them. They get together and they hire a manager, which is pretty important. It's got to be run with a little business expertise. You just can't say, 'Hey, my brother-in-law's got a parking lot. Let's put up some tents and fly some balloons and see what happens.' It can't be a sort of hippie-dippy exercise. It's got to be well thought out and organized. You organize farmers. You organize the marketplace. Then you organize the consumers to be there. Then government basically gets out of the way."

Asked if this is lifted from the old populist agenda, Hightower replies: "Very much so. It's populism because it's decentralized economic activity. It is giving real economic power to people and making available channels through which they can gain that economic power. It is creating an alternative that's real, that puts money in people's pockets.

"It's a fairly good example, I think, of the difference between a classic liberal approach and a populist approach. A liberal approach to that marketplace is to say, well, we need to bust up the wholesale markets. You need to do something negative to the marketplace. This says you need to do something positive to the marketplace. You need to expand it, and give the little people a way around the blockage in the marketplace rather than spending all your time fighting a negative battle.

"My experience has taught me that even if you win that negative battle, you don't win anything. The bust-up of AT&T is a recent example, or back to the bust-up with Standard Oil. There's no long-term gain. And the old populist movement, as Larry Goodwyn pointed out in his book [*Democratic Promise*], is based on the concept of forming a new financial system that

**HOME-GROWN PRODUCE FOR SALE.**


*photo by Scott Van Osdol*

could finance those farmers and get around the company town financing system that they were under. That's the same concept that is at work here.

"We're doing two or three of these kinds of approaches. Another one is the agricultural development bond concept, which creates a new financing mechanism since banks are not now loaning, nor does government have the money to loan, the farmers the money to get into processing."

Hightower is referring to state legislation he lobbied hard for last spring. The new law was developed by DeMarco and allows county authorities to issue tax-exempt bonds at below-market interest rates, to fund agricultural development projects that are at least 50-percent-owned by producers. The hope is that farmers will thus be able to move into the middleman's part of the food chain, as two producer-owned companies already in operation have done. One is a west Texas fabric mill that processes cotton grown by its owners into denim for blue jeans; the other is a farmer-owned chili pepper processing plant that makes chili powder and paprika in El Paso. The possibilities are endless:

"You might have a cooperative of Panhandle onion growers who are getting eight cents a pound for their onions now, which is beneath their cost of production. Yet you've got frozen onion rings selling at the wholesale market for $1.33 a pound. We can help organize those farmers to form cooperatives to go into a frozen onion ring processing facility, but there's no financing mechanism to finance that facility. Government's not going to pay for it. So we created this bond system that accumulates a new pool of capital to loan for this purpose, and that's essentially all they can loan this money for, so there's a strong incentive for them to loan it. It's in their self-interest to do it. It's in the self-interest of the bond lawyers to put these things together. And then the farmers get the money to build these facilities.

"So we've created two things that are in the populist tradition: one, a financing mechanism and, two, a processing facility that allows them to bypass the middleman and begin to get the value-added dollar, which is where the money is. Texas doesn't do much processing, so it's good for our state. Even the Texas business establishment can look at that and say that makes some kind of sense."

## ANOTHER SIDE OF HIGHTOWER'S

strategy has the potential for a much greater effect on market development for Texas farmers than does the farmers' market plans detailed above. He suggests bypassing the international commodity traders in the international marketplace. According to his plan:

"Our state Agriculture Department could maintain a small, highly mobile staff, able to move into the international market to arrange sales that farmers can make directly through their cooperatives and marketing associations. The department might have a full time staffer, for example, competent to do business on behalf of Texas farmers and ranchers throughout Latin America, capable of speaking the Spanish language, of understanding the cultures of these diverse countries, their individual, unique business practices, and of establishing contacts with private businesses and governments wanting to buy American products. . . .

"The staff would make preliminary contacts . . . then bring the purchase directly home to Texas, making the sale available to any interested group of farmers through a cooperative marketing group. This staff would then help these farmers pool their commodities, help move the commodities to the ports and help arrange financing for the transaction. In this way not only could Texas agriculture increase its share of the international market, but more of the money exchanged would end up in the pockets of our farmers, and the Texas economy would be bolstered by millions of dollars now going to Minneapolis, New York, Brussels, and other headquarters of the international commodity conglomerates.

"Similarly, a state agricultural marketing staff could become more aggressive in the institutional markets of this country – everything from national supermarket chains to government agencies that buy food. Again, this staff would be packagers of sales, opening up new marketing opportunities and helping farmers and ranchers fulfill the sales directly. For example, in cities of the Midwest, the market potential for Texas grapefruit is nowhere near saturated, yet down in the Rio Grande Valley this year 40 percent of the citrus that we produced stayed on the trees, rotting for lack of sales. An informed and aggressive marketing staff in our state Department of Agriculture could link up these Texas grapefruit producers with Midwestern supermarket chains to supply consumers in cities like Akron, Chicago, and Detroit."

The "informed and aggressive marketing staff" envisioned here is being put together this fall, with funding secured from the 1983 legislature for the fiscal year that began September 1

**HIGHTOWER MINGLES WITH AN AUSTIN CROWD.**

*photo©1983 by Alan Pogue*

– and with hopes for having some concrete results to show Texas farmers as early as next year.

## HIGHTOWER'S THOUGHTS ON

help for farmworkers are also down-to-earth and practical. A special issue of the *Texas Observer* published in January, 1978, was an early forum for some of this thinking, the theme being that the answer to the much-studied "plight of the migrant worker," over which liberals have been wringing their hands for years, was to stop throwing federal poverty funds at it and grant the workers collective bargaining rights. That issue also sounded a recurring Hightower theme – that family farmers and farmworkers have interests in common and should work side-by-side.

As a spokesperson for the Texas Farmers Union wrote in 1978, "Farmworker bargaining would have little practical effect on small family farmers in Texas, since they hardly employ any: 93 percent of Texas farmers either employ no workers at all, or only one hired hand. It's the other 7 percent of farms – the big agribusiness operations – that hire nearly all workers and profit by keeping wages low."

Now such people are saying that if the big producers had to pay a decent minimum wage to farmworkers, then the small farmer would have a better chance of competing in the marketplace. Does Hightower think it's conceivable or possible that the small farmers and farmworkers will ever get together?

"I think it's possible. It's not an easy task. It's one that I care about and that we're trying to do, using the good offices of the Department of Agriculture. There has not been an effort in the past to bring farmworkers into the Department of Agriculture at all or to consider them even constituents of the Department of Agriculture. We do consider them constituents. We are hiring a farmworker coordinator to deal with specific farmworker problems.

"That is a first, probably in the country, but certainly in Texas. A function of that farmworker coordinator is to try to find ways to bring farmers and farmworkers together around specific issues.

"Small farmers, but also some not-so-small farmers, do not want to be exploiting the farmworkers and want to find some common areas where they can work together, including good wages. I think a stronger minimum wage law in Texas for farmworkers would probably meet less resistance than the workers' compensation bill has. The workers' comp bill actually is a great stride for us in Texas for farmworker-farmer relationships because it broke a lot of ice. Also, it splashed a little cold water on the political coalitions and perceptions that have existed in the Texas Legislature.

"Some of the old-line farm groups now have to look at their hole card because their coalition didn't hold up. They now have to recognize that there are Mexican-Americans in the Texas Legislature and that there are urban interests and some rural interests that will vote with those Mexican-Americans for farmworkers. That's going to change the balance for a long time. That balance should only improve as we proceed, but we're not going to sit back and assume it's going to improve. We are going to be working in the department, having these meetings around specific issues, like the minimum wage, farmworkers' compensation, pesticide-herbicide use, and so on."

## BACK IN THE CAMPAIGN DAYS,

and the early months in office, Hightower's response to those who thought of the post of Agriculture Commissioner as a "backwater job," was no – it's a potential "bully pulpit." He would say, "This office could be a very important cauldron so the Democratic Party has a farm policy that actually says something. That's going to come from practical experience, not from some think-tank in Washington."

In April, 1983, he was named national chair of the Democratic Party's Agriculture Council, whose job it is to draft the agriculture plank of the party's 1984 platform and whose wish it is to play a major role in drafting the 1985 farm bill. He plans a series of agricultural forums around the country – the first was held October 15 in Dallas – to gather ideas from family farmers and ranchers and to hear from the Democratic presidential contenders on their positions on farm issues. Here's how he sees their purpose:

THE TEXOMA REGIONAL MARKET, OPEN SINCE JULY 1.

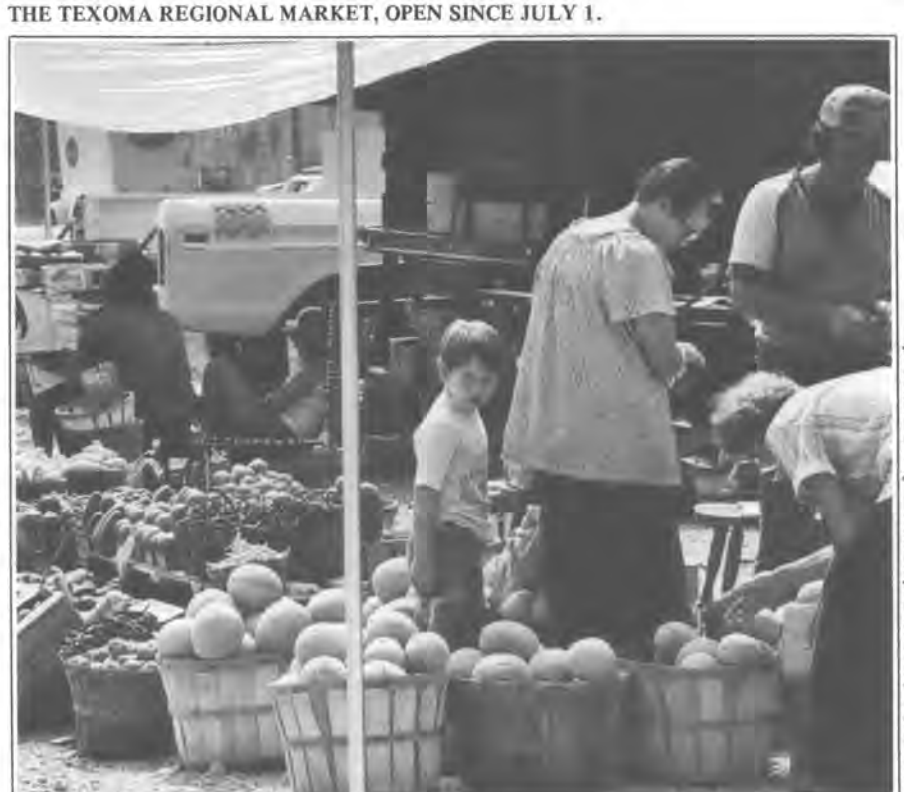


*photo courtesy Texas Department of Agriculture*

"We know what the Reagan administration is going to offer in the way of agriculture policy – not the details but certainly the principles are clear. Basically what they're going to be saying is: 'Get the government out of agriculture,' which will have a nice ring to it but will, of course, completely destroy our family farm and ranch system. The problem has been that the Democrats have no clear alternative to offer voters.

"What I want to do is to use this Agriculture Council as a forum to develop a Democratic alternative that genuinely is different. We'll do it better than Reagan will. In fact, we have the opportunity in '84 – because of the presidential elections, because the farm economy is so disastrous, because the Republicans are going to take such an extreme position – to do something fundamental to the 50-year-old Agricultural Adjustment Act, the basic mechanism under which our policy has operated for 50 years. To do something fundamentally different rather than just tinker with that mechanism.

"Right now we have a farm program, really a series of programs – a cotton program, a feed grain program, a tobacco program – but we have no farmer program. We have no real principle underlying a farm policy that the public, broadly speaking, has consented to. So you've got a farm policy that doesn't work. A farm policy that deals with bushels and bales rather than people. The original concept is what we've got to go back to, which is a program that focuses on the people we're trying to help in the first place. What we now do is spend a whole lot of money on programs that end up not helping the people.

"Next year you'll see a phenomenon of rapidly rising food prices, farm bankruptcies, and the highest-cost farm program in our history. That's a hell of a farm program.

"So these forums are an opportunity for us to try out some of our ideas – everything from fairly conventional Democratic thinking, such as mandatory set-aside programs with a high loan rate, to some new concepts. Governor Carlin of Kansas, Governor Kerrey of Nebraska, and Governor Schwinden of Montana are kicking around the notion of some sort of national board that sets farm production quotas and prices – so that you gear production to demand both domestic and international. Canada has a model of that in their wheat board.

"What we want to do is to go out and, instead of holding closed meetings the way John Block [USDA secretary] is doing on Republican agricultural policy, we want to have a series of these little forums around the country so that a farmer on the turnrow can come in and say, 'Here's what I think.' But also so we could ask him, 'If we were to do this, would it work?'

"We have the function of organizing the farm and rural constituency early, which has never in my lifetime been done by either party. Usually the farmers get invited in after the nomination and you throw a letterhead committee together of Farmers for So-and-So. This time we're trying to get them organized, get their names, addresses, phone numbers, voting precincts, and all that kind of stuff.

"The Democratic farm vote that, in 1980, went for Reagan is not going for Reagan this time if the Democrats do their job. And that's the job I've been selected to take a leadership role in – to formulate a new policy and then to carry that policy, if necessary, independently of the presidential campaigns to the voters.

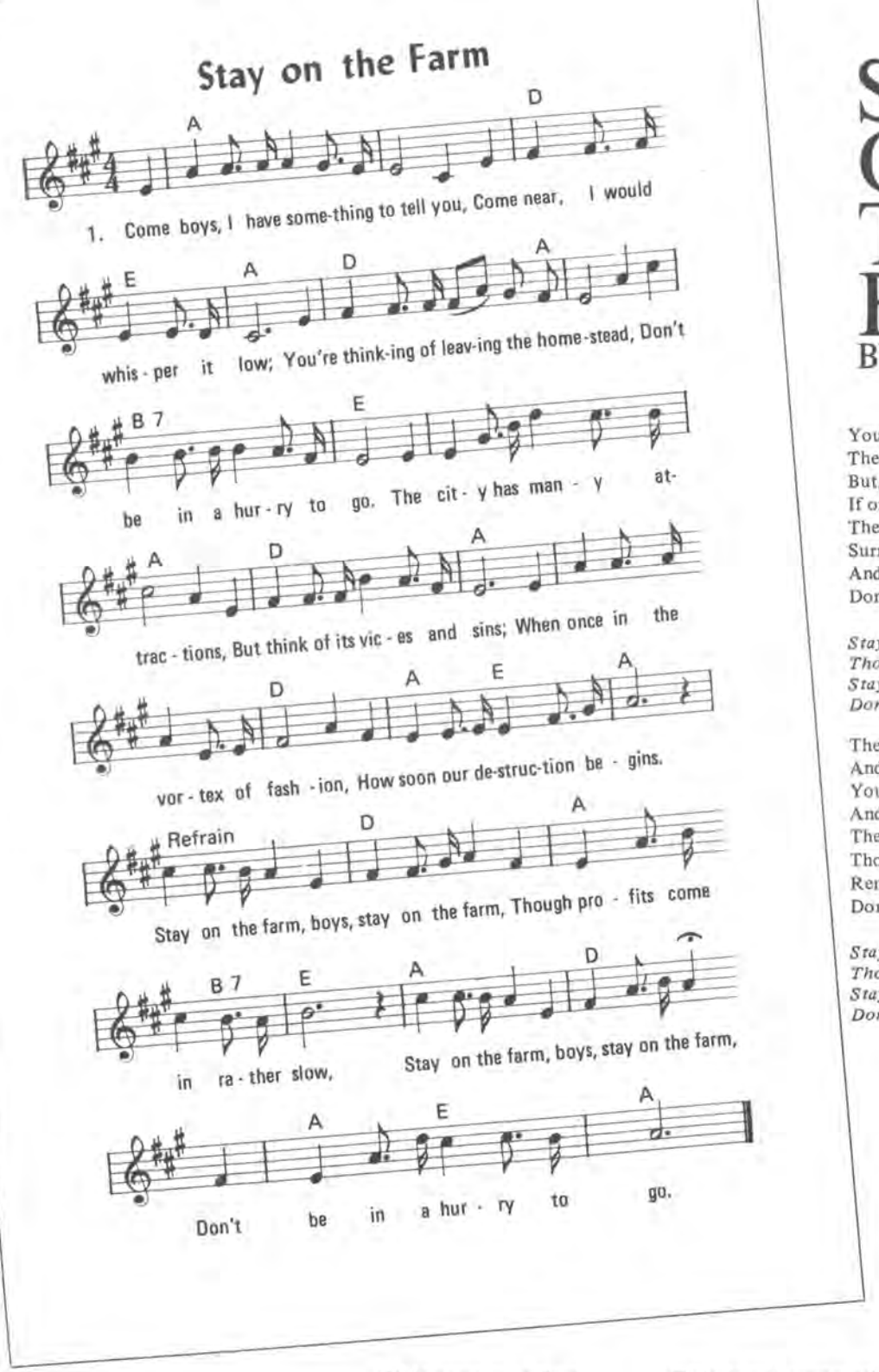
"And not just to the farm voters but, as I did in my election here in Texas, to the urban voters. The Democratic Party national leadership has recognized, as we did here in Texas, that the greatest voter appeal for the family farm is in the cities. There's a sympathy there – a desire on the part of urban people to help farmers. But they have no mechanism for doing that. All they do is go to the supermarket. If you were to do an exit poll of people at supermarkets, they'd say, 'I wish more of my dollar was going to the farmer, but I don't know how to get it there.'

"So if we are able to articulate a farm policy, which is to say simplify it, in terms of why we have one in the first place – whom we are trying to help – then we will win the farm vote. We'll be the party that is going to be putting forward the program that's going to help the farmers. And that's going to help in the cities. □

*Geoffrey Rips, associate editor of the* ***Texas Observer****, interviewed Jim Hightower on September 21, 1983; a lengthier, somewhat different, version appeared in that magazine. Linda Rocawich, a* ***Southern Exposure*** *editor, was managing editor of the* ***Texas Observer*** *during and after Hightower's tenure there.*

**HIGHTOWER AND CONSTITUENT SHARE A MEAL.**

*photo courtesy the* Texas Observer




# STAY ON THE FARM

BY JAMES L. ORR

You talk of the mines of Australia,
They're wealthy in treasure, no doubt;
But, ah, there is gold on the farm, boys,
If only you'll shovel it out.
The mercantile life is a hazard,
Surrounded by glitter and show,
And wealth is not made in a day, boys, —
Don't be in a hurry to go.

*Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,*
*Though profits come in rather slow,*
*Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,*
*Don't be in a hurry to go.*

The farm is the best and the safest,
And certainly surest to pay;
You're free as the air of the mountain,
And monarch of all you survey.
Then stay on the farm a while longer,
Though profits come in rather slow,
Remember you've nothing to risk, boys,
Don't be in a hurry to go.

*Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,*
*Though profits come in rather slow,*
*Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,*
*Don't be in a hurry to go.*

This song was first published in a nineteenth-century songbook by the Grange, or the Order of Patrons of Husbandry. The Grange was the first general farm organization in the United States and was most active during the late 1870s, when it fought successfully for regulation of railroad and elevator practices. The Grange also organized farm cooperatives and provided social and educational activities in rural areas. It was to be an active farmers' organization in many states.

This is only one of about 50 farming and gardening songs, old and new, rediscovered and compiled by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association in its songbook, *Sing the Good Earth.* To order a copy, send $5.25 to CFSA, Route 2, Box 161-R, Pittsboro, NC 27312. Bulk rates available.

# RESOURCES

## IN GENERAL

A well-worn copy of ***New Directions in Farm, Land and Food Policies: A Time for State and Local Action*** belongs in the hands of anyone who wants to get involved in food politics. Each of 17 chapters discusses one or another of the major issues in brief, lists resource groups and a bibliography, and reprints several pages of key resource material. At the end are 40 pages of general resources and contact people. It's 320 pages in all from the Agriculture Project of the **Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies.** Other project publications include a state-by-state guide to *New Initiatives in Farm, Land and Food Legislation* and a briefing book on new programs and responses for *Assisting Beginning Farmers.* Write for a resource catalogue. 2000 Florida Avenue, N.W., Room 400, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 387-6030.

The **National Sharecroppers Fund** and **Rural Advancement Fund** work hand-in-hand for the family farm and a just, ecological agricultural system. Organizers from their farm survival program are working with farmers in danger of losing their farms to the current agricultural credit crisis. They also are involved in educational campaigns and political efforts to preserve crop diversity. There's a quarterly newsletter and many other publications. Among the most recent: *The 2nd Graham Center Seed and Nursery Directory,* whose subtitle aptly describes it as "a gardener's and farmer's guide to sources of traditional, old-timey vegetable, fruit and nut varieties, herbs and native plants." Write for more information; the seed directory is $2. P.O. Box 1029, Pittsboro, NC 27312; (919) 542-5292.

**World Hunger Year** is a group devoted to changing the political, economic, and social relations, decisions, and policies that result in or affect malnutrition and hunger in the U.S. and abroad. ***Food Monitor*** is its bimonthly magazine, with the best available coverage of world systems of food production, financing, and distribution. Unfortunately, *Food Monitor* is in grave danger. The editors plan a big special issue on hunger in America for late 1983, and they say it will be the last unless a current frenetic fund-raising campaign is successful. Write them at 350 Broadway, Suite 209, New York, NY 10013; (212) 226-2714.

**Rural America** is a national membership organization advocating social and economic justice for rural and small-town people. Its bimonthly magazine ***ruralamerica*** is indispensable for keeping up with the news; numerous other publications also available. National office: 1302 18th Street, N.W., Third Floor, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 659-2800. Southeastern office: 4795 McWillie Drive, Suite 210, Jackson, MS 39206.

The **Rural Coalition**, made up of dozens of member organizations with a progressive interest in rural affairs, is a rural action network to support its members' efforts to influence public policy and private-sector decision-making. Technical assistance, research, communications, monitoring of federal policy and legislation are among its functions. Its agriculture task force plans to continue some of the work of the National Family Farm Coalition, which folded earlier this year. Quarterly report and other publications available. 1000 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20007; (202) 338-4630.

The **Cornucopia Project** of Rodale Press studies the U.S. food system with a vision of radical change that would transform it into one that sustains and conserves resources. The major national findings are reported in *Empty Breadbasket?* (170 pages, $4). There are also numerous other reports, surveys, pamphlets, and audio-visual aids. Studies of the food systems and prospects of individual states are in preparation; for the South, Florida and Kentucky are ready and others are in progress ($3 each). A quarterly newsletter is $8 a year: 33 E. Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18049; (215) 967-5171.

***Plowed Under: American Farmers in Georgia*** is a documentary in five half-hour segments telling the story of rapid changes in food production, and of the despair and anger of the farmers who can no longer make a living at the work they love. The final show asks whether the independent farmer can be saved and explores various ideas of experts who answer "yes." Produced by Harlon Joye and Cliff Kuhn for WRFG in Atlanta, with funds from the

Presbyterian Hunger Program and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Write WRFG, P.O. Box 5332, Atlanta, GA 30307; (404) 523-3471.

***Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity,*** by Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins, and Cary Fowler, reveals hunger to be an "unnatural disaster," documenting that food scarcity and overpopulation are symptoms, not causes – symptoms of the concentration of control over food-producing resources. Following the book's publication in 1977, Lappe and Collins founded the **Institute for Food and Development Policy** to continue their work, including programs to stop pesticide dumping, public education about

*The prints of vegetables and plants appearing throughout this section were hand-blocked by Tema Okun and Allan Troxler.*

foreign aid, hunger, food exports, and Third World development. Write for a list of publications and audio-visual aids. 1885 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103; (415) 864-8555.

The **Food Research and Action Center** is a nonprofit law firm and advocacy center working with the poor and near-poor to end hunger and malnutrition in the U.S. Its particular expertise is as watchdog of the federal feeding programs, especially food stamps, but its premise is that redistribution of the nation's economic resources is the only real solution to

the hunger problem. ***FRAC's Guide to the Food Stamp Program*** is the best users' manual around; dozens of other helpful publications also available. 2011 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 452-8250.

***In a Land of Plenty*** is a color film about Southern poor people striving to save their families and farms. United Methodist Film Service, 1525 McGavock Street, Nashville, TN 37203.

***Guess Who's Coming to Breakfast?*** is a slide show examining the multinational corporation Gulf + Western, its involvement in agricultural exploitation, and the whole question of corporate control of our food supply. Earthwork, 1499 Potrero, San Francisco, CA 94110.

A few books that have proved highly useful to food activists include:

***Diet for a Small Planet,*** by Frances Moore Lappe, in a revised and updated tenth anniversary edition (Ballantine Books, 1982).

***Eat Your Heart Out: How Food Profiteers Victimize the Consumer,*** by Jim Hightower (Vintage Books, 1975).

***Farming for Profit in a Hungry World,*** by Michael Perlman (Allanheld, Osmun, & Co., 1978).

***The Feeding Web; Issues in Nutritional Ecology,*** by Joan Gussow (Bull Publishing, 1978).

***Food for Beginners,*** by Susan George and Nigel Paige (Norton, 1982).

***Food for People, Not for Profit: A Sourcebook on the Food Crisis,*** by Catherine Lerza and Michael Jacobson (Ballantine Books, 1975).

***Future Food,*** by Colin Tudge (Harmony Books, 1980).

***Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times: The Failure of the Land Grant College Complex,*** by Jim Hightower and Susan DeMarco.

## ORGANIC FARMING

***The New Farm*** is the "magazine of regenerative agriculture," published seven times a year by Rodale Press – news, features, and advice, with worldwide coverage of related issues. Subscriptions are $15 a year; 222 Main Street, Emmaus, PA 18049; (215) 967-5171.

**Rodale Press** is also the publisher of numerous books of interest in this field, including *Basic Organic Gardening* ($6.95), *The Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening* ($24.95), *The Organic Gardener's Complete Guide to Vegetables and Fruits* ($21.95), and much more – including *Organic Gardening* magazine ($9 for 12 monthly issues). Write for a catalogue: 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18049; (215) 967-5171.

***Acres U.S.A.*** is the monthly newspaper "voice for eco-agriculture," oriented toward commercial-scale organic farming. These folks also have a 1979 book, *An Acres U.S.A. Primer* on "techniques of eco-agriculture." The newspaper is $7 a year. Write P.O. Box 9547, Raytown, MO 64133.

If your food co-op is having trouble finding sources of organic food – or if you're a grower who wants to find an outlet for your produce – you need the ***Directory of Wholesalers of Organic Produce and Products.*** It is a national guide indexed by state and by commodity with full information about terms, services, minimums, and so forth. California has the most listings, but we found at least one wholesaler in each of seven Southern states in the 1983 directory. The 1984 edition will be out in January. Write: California Agrarian Action Project, P.O. Box 464, Davis, CA 95617; (916) 756-8518. The project also has a brochure answering the question: "What is Organic Food?"

***The Necessary Catalogue of Biological Farm and Garden Supplies*** is a handy source of information and supplies, a Southern mail-order supplier of pest controls, nutrients, composting supplies, equipment, tools, and books. Write the Necessary Trading Company, New Castle, VA 42127; (703) 864-5103.

Another look at the subject of the article on page 14, a more technical one, is "The Chicken Manure Connection – Organic Farming in the South," published in the May/June, 1981, issue of *The New Farm* magazine.

Many Southern states have associations of growers, most of which publish quarterly or bimonthly newsletters:

**Georgia Organic Growers Association,** Route 2, Box 391, Commerce, GA 30529.

**Carolina Farm Stewardship Association,** Route 1, Box 397, Franklinville, NC 27248; (919) 498-4076.

**Kentucky New Farm Coalition,** Route 1, Pleasureville, KY 40057; (502) 878-4826.

**Mississippi Organic Growers Association,** c/o H.J. Massie, 1525 Roswell Drive, Jackson, MS 39211.

**Tennessee Alternative Growers Association,** Route 6, Box 526, Crossville, TN 38555; (615) 788-2736.

**Virginia Association of Biological Farmers,** Box 252, Flint Hill, VA 22627. Publishes *The Virginia Biological Farmer* quarterly.

The **Institute for Alternative Agriculture** is a new research and public education group founded by Dr. I. Garth Youngberg, former organic agriculture coordinator for USDA. Publishes the *Alternative Agriculture News* monthly. 9200 Edmonston Road, Suite 117, Greenbelt, MD 20770; (301) 441-8777. Membership is $15 a year.

Keep up to date on the congressional progress of the new organic farming bill (the Agricultural Productivity Act of 1983, HR. 2714 and S. 1128) – and with the fight to support organic farming research generally – through Bob Scowcroft of **Friends of the Earth,** 1045 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94111; (415) 433-7373.

## NUTRITION

The **Center for Science in the Public Interest** is an organization of scientists, nutrition educators, and members of the general public that monitors current research and the actions of federal agencies affecting nutrition, food safety, and the food business. CSPI publishes its work in books, pamphlets, other educational materials, posters, and T-shirts.

For example: *Eater's Digest* is a factbook that describes more than 100 of the most commonly used food additives (260 pages; $5). *Jack Sprat's Legacy: The Science and Politics of Fat and Cholesterol* examines the link between high-fat diets and heart disease and cancer. It also shows how the meat, dairy, and egg industries have tried to prevent the U.S. government from encouraging people to eat low-fat, low-cholesterol diets (288 pages; $6.95). *The Changing American Diet* documents what has happened to our eating habits and why. Just to name a couple of changes, soft drink consumption has more than tripled between 1960 and 1980, and consumption of *fresh* potatoes has dropped by more than 70 percent between 1910 and 1980 (88 pages; $4). Write for a publication list.

Also of note: CSPI publishes ***Nutrition Action*** magazine 10 times a year, and it offers excellent coverage of the field for general readers. Membership, including a subscription to *Nutrition Action,* is $20 a year. 1755 S Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009; (202) 332-9110.

The **Community Nutrition Institute** is an advocacy group monitoring food quality and safety, nutrition research, hunger, federal food programs, and so on. Keep up with the news with CNI's weekly newsletter ($50 a year). There is also *Community Nutritionist,* a professional journal published six times a year. 1146 19th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036; (202) 833-1730.

**Natural Food Associates** is an education and advocacy organization emphasizing the nutritional improvements to be derived from naturally grown food. It publishes *Natural Food and Farming* magazine monthly. Membership is $12 a year, including a subscription. There is also an NFA bookstore, a good mail-order source of materials on this subject. P.O. Box 331, Atlanta, TX 75551.

**Action for Children's Television,** a group that uses community education, legal action, and dialogue with broadcasters to try to increase the diversity of children's programming and eliminate commercial abuses aimed at children, has been a strong opponent of the child-directed advertising of sugar-laden cereals and other junk foods. Write for a list of books, films, posters, and other material: 46 Austin Street, Newtonville, MA 02160; (617) 527-7870.

***Eating Better at School*** is an organizers' guide to improving the nutritional quality of school meals with an extensive annotated reading list, put out by the Children's Foundation (1420 New York Avenue, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005) and CSPI. Order from either for $2.

The **Food Research and Action Center** has done a lot of good work to help people organizing to improve school lunch and breakfast programs. For example, there's an organizing *Guide to Quality School Lunch and Breakfast Programs,* complete with all sorts of sample letters, press releases, flyers, etc. A new report on *Doing More with Less* has ideas for reducing program costs, including lots of names and addresses of people to go to for help. Write for a publication list. 2011 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 452-8250.

# RESOURCES

There are a number of good audio-visual aids on nutrition for children, and many are listed in *Eating Better at School*. For example:

***Hamburger USA*** is a slide/tape show that examines each part of a cheeseburger and where it comes from. Each layer shows the economic concentration in the food system and the extent of corporate involvement in our daily lives. From: American Friends Service Committee, 2160 Lake Street, San Francisco, CA 94121.

***Eat, Drink, and Be Wary*** is a color film about food additives and processed foods. From: Churchill Films, 662 N. Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

***Six Billion Dollar Sell*** is a color film featuring gimmicks used by food advertisers to sell their products to children. From: Consumers Union, 256 Washington Street, Mount Vernon, NY 10550.

For more specific information on the nutritional approach to good health, Dr. James Carter (see the interview on page 38) recommends a few books:

***Eat Well, Get Well, Stay Well,*** by Carlton Fredericks documents the effectiveness of nutritional control of disease – scientific data, case studies, nutritional tables and charts, recommended dietary changes (Grosset & Dunlap, 1980).

***On Being Black and Healthy,*** by George Berkley, is subtitled "how black Americans can lead longer and healthier lives." Many of the diseases that are closely connected to diet strike black Americans with far more frequency than they do whites. For example, high blood pressure strikes blacks almost twice as often as whites; diabetes and many forms of cancer are also more prevalent. This book analyzes the facts and reasons, and offers sound advice (Prentice-Hall, 1982).

***You Are What You Eat,*** by Sara Gilbert, is "a common-sense guide to the modern American diet," that takes a look at our food patterns and how they are shaped by the food industry. Tables, charts, and basic dietary good sense (McMillan, 1977).

***The New Vegetarian,*** by Gary Null with Steve Null, offers an alternative to the modern American diet, and the authors' approach is exemplified in the first sentence: "Nutritional awareness is the first step to good health." This is not a cookbook; it's a simple explanation of what vegetarianism is and how you can modify and improve your diet. A very thorough treatment of protein is particularly valuable. Getting enough complete protein without eating meat is a simple enough matter, but you must be conscious of the need and know what you're doing (Dell, 1978).

Marci Kramish, who offered some nutritional advice on page 40, recommends a couple of basic works: ***A Handbook of Commonsense Nutrition,*** by Sue R. Williams (Mosby and Co., 1983); and ***Jane Brody's Nutrition Book*** (Bantam, 1981). If you want to know what's in your food – protein, vitamins, whatever – turn to ***Food Values of Portions Commonly Used*** (13th edition, Harper & Row, 1980). She also suggests, for cooks with their health in mind, the ***American Heart Association Cookbook*** (third edition, Ballantine, 1979).

***Self-Reliance Journal*** did an issue on nutrition last year, a 16-page booklet that covers the basics, available for $1. The Southwest Research and Information Center, publisher of the journal, also publishes ***The Workbook,*** six times a year, with regular reviews of new resource material on food and nutrition. P.O. Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106; (505) 262-1862.

## CO-OPS

***Communities*** is the "journal of cooperation" published by the long-established Twin Oaks Community in Virginia – the best periodical coverage we know of on the subject, five times a year for $10. Also available. *The Best of Communities,* a tenth anniversary issue with reprints; includes the 1983 directory of communities ($3.50). And *A Guide to Cooperative Alternatives,* 184 pages, $5. P.O. Box 462, Louisa, VA 23093.

The **Cooperative League of the U.S.A.** (CLUSA) is a national federation of customer-owned businesses that does co-op advocacy work, including support for direct farm marketing and for family and small farms. Write for

a publications list. 1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036; (202) 872-0550.

***The Food Co-op Handbook: How to Bypass Supermarkets to Control the Quality and Price of the Food You Eat*** is a primer on organizing food co-ops, from the first meeting to expanding into federations. It uses the firsthand experience of dozens of people who helped write the book: the Co-op Handbook Collective (Houghton-Mifflin, 1975).

***We Own It: Starting and Managing Coops, Collectives, and Employee Owned Ventures*** is a newer (1982) handbook, with information on incorporating your co-op, on cooperative corporation laws in each state, plus a lot of other vital information on the history and principles of cooperation, types of co-ops, etc. Written by Peter Jan Honigsberg, Bernard Kamoroff, and Jim Beatty; $9 from Bell Springs Publishing, P.O. Box 640, Laytonville, CA 95454.

***Resources for Food Co-ops*** is a selective bibliography listing periodicals, books, and other publications on such subjects as market analysis, co-op promotion and member development, legal concerns, finance, etc. It's $1.75 from the Marketing Division, National Consumer Cooperative Bank, 1630 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009.

The **Cooperative Directory Association** is a network of more than 150 co-op activists and co-ops who gather information on the growing network of consumer and producer cooperatives. The association publishes an annual *Directory of Cooperative Groups* with more than 4,000 listings ($5 to individuals and co-ops, $10 to institu-

tions or commercial organizations). It also provides referrals, information services, and technical assistance, and sells mailing lists of co-ops and institutions, agencies, and individuals who are working to support the cooperative movement. P.O. Box 2667, Santa Fe, NM 87501; (505) 982-2288.

If your family is, like most of us, trying to make it on a (too-) limited income, you'll want to get June A. Blotnick's ***Food Coop Resource and Action Guide for Families on Limited Incomes*** (1982); a how-to manual for persons interested in forming their own low-investment-cost food-buying club. Besides offering general information about low-income co-ops, the guide also provides a detailed outline for organizing your club, answers both common and unusual questions about getting started, and gives real life examples. Available for $5 from North State Legal Services, Inc., 102 W. King Street, Hillsborough, NC 27278; (919) 732-8137; 229-6496.

Students who are interested in forming a co-op can get information on how to get started, on lobbying around co-op issues, and books about co-ops from the **North American Students of Cooperation**. Write them at Box 7293, Ann Arbor, MI 48107; (313) 663-0889.

***Self-Reliance Journal*** did an issue last year on cooperatives, a 16-page booklet that covers the basics, available for $1. The Southwest Research and Information Center, publisher of the journal, also publishes ***The Workbook*** six times a year, with regular reviews of new resource material on cooperatives; $12 a year. P.O. Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106; (505) 262-1862.

The **Federation of Southern Cooperatives** is an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, when a great many low-income producer cooperatives were organized by Southern blacks, with assistance from civil rights workers. The federation was formed in 1967 and provides support and technical assistance to its member co-ops, which are scattered from Virginia to the Rio Grande Valley – 30,000 poor families organized into 110 member co-ops. See lengthy coverage in *Southern Exposure* – in "Our Promised Land," Volume II, Number 2-3, and in "Prevailing Voices," Volume X, Number 5. FSC has a demonstration farm and rural training center at P.O. Box 95, Epes AL 35460; (205) 652-9676; and a fund-raising office at 40 Marietta Street, N.W., Atlanta, GA 30303; (404) 524-6882.

The **Southern Cooperative Development Fund**, offering technical and financial assistance to co-ops and community organizations in the South, was described in the article on page 42. P.O. Box 3885, Lafayette, LA 70501; (318) 232-9206.

Regional federations of cooperatives dot the Southern landscape. They can offer practical guidance and information to people or groups wanting to form a co-op or food-buying club. Most also operate warehouses to supply wholesale goods to their member co-ops and have product catalogues that detail warehouse procedures, directions for opening accounts, distribution schedules, and so on. Most federations hold annual conferences for members

and publish regular newsletters.

**Appalantic Federation of Cooperatives** encompasses food co-ops in North Carolina, Virginia, and neighboring areas of West Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. It owns Mountain Warehouse, a cooperatively managed bulk-foods warehouse, and Dharma Trucking. Appalantic: P.O. Box 396, Williamsburg, VA 23187; (804) 253-2310. Mountain Warehouse: P.O. Box 3576, Durham, NC 27702; (919) 682-9234.

**Magnolia: Southern Confederation for Cooperation** encompasses food co-ops in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Puerto Rico. P.O. Box 20293, Tallahassee, FL 32304; (904) 224-8899.

**New Destiny Federation** encompasses food co-ops in Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and nearby regions of Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas. The Ozark Cooperative Warehouse, a worker-run collective, is its purchasing agent and storage and distribution center. P.O. Box 30, Fayetteville, AR 72701; (501) 521-4920.

**Federation of Ohio River Co-ops** warehouses and delivers food to co-ops in West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. 320 Outerbelt Street, Suite D, Columbus, OH 43213; (614) 861-2446. For information about *FORClift*, the federation's newsletter, write: Marsha Mudd, 723 College Avenue, Morgantown, WV 26505; (304) 296-1023.

**Co-op America** is a national membership association and buying club for socially responsible co-ops, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. It acts as a "middleperson," brokering the goods and services of its member groups, and is itself a cooperative. It also brokers group health and life insurance, a money market fund, management consulting, job listings, and discounts on certain kinds of goods and services. 2100 M Street, N.W., Suite 605, Washington, DC 20063; (202) 872-5307.

## FARMWORKERS

Numerous books and articles have been written on the deplorable and degrading conditions under which farmworkers live and labor. The titles listed here are representative accounts of the farm labor situation. These are classics selected for their specific focuses on: a historical perspective on agricultural labor, unionizing efforts among farmworkers, and the perpetual cycle of exploitation, psychological slavery, and peonage in the East Coast migrant stream:

***Women of Crisis***, by Robert Coles and Jane Hallowell Coles (Delacorte Press, 1978).

***Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers***, Volume II of "Children of Crisis," by Robert Coles (Little, Brown, 1971).

***The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-69***, by Pete Daniel (University of Illinois Press, 1972).

***Hard Traveling: Migrant Farm Workers in America***, by Tony Dunbar and Linda Kravitz (Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976).

***Factories in the Field***, by Carey McWilliams (Peregrine Smith, 1935).

***Mean Things Happening in This Land***, by H.L. Mitchell (Allanheld, Osmun, 1979).

***Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa***, by Jacques Levy (Norton, 1975).

***The Slaves We Rent***, by Truman Moore (Random House, 1965).

***The Grapes of Wrath***, by John Steinbeck (Viking Press, 1939).

***Sweatshops in the Sun: Child Labor on the Farm***, by Paul Taylor (Beacon Press, 1973).

Audio-visual aids on farm labor abound. Here's a sampling:

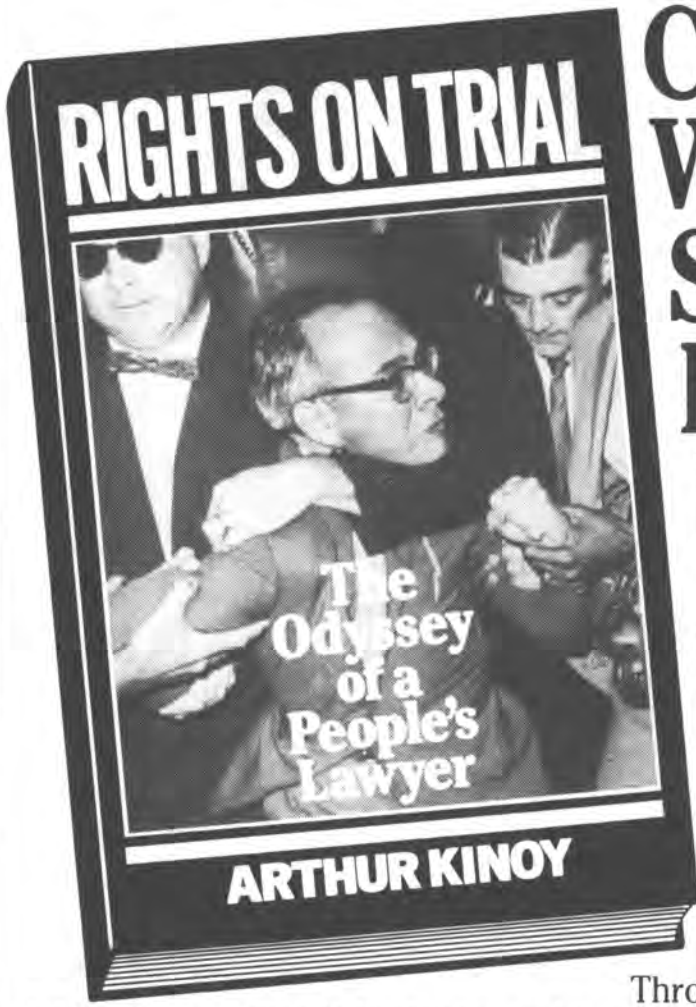
***Letter to a Georgia Mother*** is a film written and produced in the early 1950s by farmworkers, depicting the degrading conditions of the East Coast migrant stream and the need for a farmworkers' union. Available on videotape from: National Farm Worker Ministry/Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers, 2722 McDowell Street, Durham, NC 27705.

***A Day Without Sunshine*** is a 1976 film produced by Robert Stulberg, exploring the powerful Florida citrus lobby and examining the difference that having a union contract has made for farmworkers at the Minute Maid processing plant in Avon Park. Also available from NFWM/Triangle Friends – address above. Or from: the National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 860, New York, NY 10027, or on videotape cassette, from Public Television Library, 475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W., Washington, DC 20024.

***Harvest of Shame*** is the Edward R. Murrow documentary, first shown on "CBS Reports" in 1960, exposing the cycle of poverty and exploitation of farmworkers in the East Coast migrant stream. Available from most public libraries.

***The Grapes of Wrath*** is the classic adaptation of John Steinbeck's novel

# FOR THIRTY-FIVE YEARS, THIS MAN HAS USED THE COURTS TO WIN THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.




The Rosenbergs, McCarthyism, the Voting Rights Movement, the Chicago Seven — wherever constitutional rights were in jeopardy, Arthur Kinoy was there.

This book is his stirring, passionate account of dark moments of repression and of the hard-won victories for the rights of minorities, radicals, protesters, and union organizers. Through these cases, Kinoy fashions a revolutionary approach to the theory and practice of people's law, showing how the legal system itself can be an instrument for social change.

"*Rights on Trial* reminds us freedom is hard to find but there is joy in the search. Read it." —Ramsey Clark

## RIGHTS ON TRIAL

The Odyssey of a People's Lawyer

Arthur Kinoy

$20.00

At bookstores or from **Harvard University Press**, Cambridge, MA 02138

portraying the hardships faced by farm laborers, victims of the drought-ravaged Midwest, who traveled to the promised land of California in search of work. Filmed in 1940 and available from

most public libraries.

*Alambrista, "The Illegal"* is a 1976 documentary feature illustrating the problems faced by Mexican workers crossing the border in search of work and their harassment by the Border Patrol. Available from: Cinema 5, 1500 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.

*Migrant* is an NBC News report chronicling conditions of farmworkers in Belle Glade, Florida, in 1970, and showing how, despite the attention of the national media and investigations by Congress during the '60s, spurred on by the 1960 airing of *Harvest of Shame*, the system and conditions remain unchanged. Available from: Films Incorporated, 733 Greenbay Road, Wilmette, IL 60091.

*Migrant II* is another NBC News Report, a follow-up visit to Belle Glade 10 years later, again showing how conditions for farmworkers have only worsened, and concluding with the statement, "Belle Glade remains the symbol of migrant exploitation." Also available from Films Incorporated.

The following is a list of farmworker groups which are actively organizing farmworkers to address their workplace issues on their own behalf and to push for collective bargaining rights.

**United Farm Workers Union**, La Paz, Box 62, Keene, CA 93531; (805) 822-5571.

**United Farm Workers Union**, P.O. Box 129, 820 S. Delaney Avenue, Avon Park, FL 33825; (813) 453-4662.

**United Farm Workers Union**, P.O. Box 1493, San Juan, TX 78589; (512) 787-2233. UFW Legislative Liaison, 1811 E. 40th Street, Austin, TX 78722; (512) 474-5019.

**Farm Labor Organizing Committee**, 714½ S. Saint Clair Street, Toledo, OH 43609; (419) 243-3456.

**CATA**, P.O. Box 458, Glassboro, NJ 08028; (609) 881-2507.

**United Migrants Association**, 103 S. Highway 17, Eloise, FL 33880; (813) 294-1274.

**Texas Farm Workers Union**, P.O. Box 231G, Pharr, TX 78577; (512) 787-5984.

**International Union of Agricultural and Industrial Workers**, P.O. Box 1458, Hidalgo, TX 78557; (512) 843-8756.

The groups listed below are ones composed of farmworkers and advocates who provide a base of support for farmworkers in the community and assistance in addressing specific work-related and local issues.

**Centro Campesino**, P.O. Box 326, Homestead, FL 33030; (305) 245-7738.

**El Centro – Service Center**, 15927 S.W. 150th Street, Indiantown, FL 33456; (305) 597-3382/-2798.

**Centro Campesino**, Box 3201, Winter Haven, FL 33880; (813) 293-4740.

**Southern Mutual Help Association**, P.O. Box 850, Jeanerette, LA 70544; (318) 276-6021.

**Eastern North Carolina Human Development Organization**, P.O. Box 466, Newton Grove, NC 28366.

**Rosales Community Education Project**, 316 S. Colsner, Edinburg, TX 78539; (512) 383-4938.

The National Farm Worker Ministry works hand-in-hand with the United Farm Workers and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee by supporting their efforts, promoting the boycotts of Red Coach Lettuce and all Campbell-owned products, and by engaging in educational and advocacy activities.

**National Farm Worker Ministry**, 1430 West Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90015; (213) 386-8131.

**National Farm Worker Ministry**, P.O. Box 4743, Tampa, FL 33677; (813) 254-3562.

**Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers/National Farm Worker Ministry**, 2722 McDowell Street, Durham, NC 27705; (919) 489-2659.

**National Farm Worker Ministry**, P.O. Box 1493, San Juan, TX 78589; (512) 787-2233.

Within the network of rural legal services offices are specific farmworker divisions. The following are active in farmworker issues.

**Migrant Legal Action Program**, 806 15th Street, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005; (205) 347-5100.

**Legal Aid Bureau**, 111 High Street, Salisbury, MD 21801; (301) 546-5511.

**Camden Legal Services – Migrant Project**, Camden, AL 36726; (205) 682-9341.

**Florida Rural Legal Services**, 572 S.W. 2nd Street, Belle Glade, FL 33430; (305) 996-5266. Or: P.O. Box 1109, 107 Main Street, Immokalee, FL 33934; (813) 657-3681.

**Georgia Legal Services – Migrant Division**, 150 S. Ridge Avenue, Tifton, GA 31794; (912) 386-3566.

**North Mississippi Rural Legal Services**, P.O. Box 767, Oxford, MS 38655; (601) 234-8731.

**Farmworkers Legal Services**, Highway 55 at the Circle, P.O. Box 398, Newton Grove, NC 28366; (919) 594-0437. Or: P.O. Box 1536, Wilson, NC 27893; (919) 291-7868.

**Neighborhood Legal Assistance Program – Migrant Division**, 438 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403; (803) 722-0107.

Farmworkers Advocacy Project of **Texas Rural Legal Aid**, Box 1931, Austin, TX 78767; (512) 474-0812. Migrant Program of **TRLA**, 259 S. Texas Street, Weslaco, TX 78596; (512) 968-6574.

**Virginia Farm Workers Legal Assistance Project**, P.O. Box 306, Belle Haven, VA 23306; (804) 442-3014.

**West Virginia Legal Services Plan**, P.O. Box 1898, 400 West Martin Street, Martinsburg, WV 25401; (304) 263-8871.

The following are farmworker support/advocacy/educational organizations:

**Farmworker Justice Fund**, P.O. Box A-28392, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 347-6327.

**National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides**, 530 7th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20003; (202) 543-4313.

**Arkansas Farmworker Civil Rights**

**Organizing Project**, P.O. Box 951, Warren, AR 71671.

**Association of Migrant Organizations**, P.O. Box 1566, Tallahassee, FL 32302; (904) 224-6817.

**Haitian Refugee Center**, P.O. Box 370543, 32 N.E. 54th Street, Miami, FL 33137; (800) 327-7519.

**East Coast Farmworker Support Network**, P.O. Box 1633, Raleigh, NC 27602; (919) 682-3818.

**Migrant Ministry Committee** of the North Carolina Council of Churches, 201-A Bryan Building, Raleigh, NC 27605; (919) 828-6501.

**North Carolina Action for Farmworkers**, P.O. Box 3049, Durham, NC 27705; (919) 684-2722.

**Texas Center for Rural Studies**, Pesticide Project, Box 2618, Austin, TX 78768; (512) 474-0811.

**Virginia State ACLU**, 112A N. 7th Street, Richmond, VA 23219; (804) 644-8022.

**Farmworker Project** of the University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, VA 22901.

## LAND

The **Emergency Land Fund** (ELF) has been doing research and organizing to combat the loss of black-owned land for more than a decade. In 1940 there were 680,000 black farm operators controlling 12 million acres of land. By the mid-1970s, the number of operators had dropped to about 54,000 with only 3.5 million acres. According to ELF president Joseph Brooks, the annual loss of black farmland is now estimated at 500,000 acres. ELF reports – such as *Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black-Owned Land in the Rural South; The Black Land Base: A Public Policy Perspective; A Report on Minority Credit Barriers in Eleven Southern States*, and many others – document the situation.

The fund also provides technical, legal, and financial assistance to black landowners in danger of losing their land, and has helped organize the **National Association of Landowners**, a membership group of black landowners in seven states. ELF's national office is at: 564 Lee Street, S.W., Atlanta, GA 30310; (404) 758-5506. State offices: 462 Sayre Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; (205) 264-0205; 2051 Senate Street, New Orleans, LA 70122; (504) 282-3424; P.O. Box 997, Jackson, MS 39205; (601) 969-7522; 617 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga, TN 37411; (615) 698-3348; There's an ELF affiliate, Black Land Services, at P.O. Box 126, Frogmore, SC 29920; (803) 838-2432.

***Under All Is the Land*** is a radio documentary series in five half-hour parts covering physical and cultural aspects of the land, the get-big-or-get-out threat to small farmers, and so forth. Written and produced by Phaye Poliakoff with music by Si Kahn and Bernice Reagon, for WVSP radio under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. For a cassette copy send $15 to WVSP, P.O. Box 365, Warrenton, NC 27589; (919) 257-1909.

The message of ***Farmland or Wasteland: A Time to Choose*** is that we must begin to consider farmland as a diminishing, valuable, renewable resource or it will disappear. Author R.

Neil Sampson reports that "220 acres of farmland are bulldozed for housing tracts and shopping centers each hour of the day; every day of the year 10 million tons of precious topsoil erode from the land that is left to farm; and . . . we are ravaging prime farmland to strip-mine for coal." He claims that it will take only 100 years at these rates to lose all our topsoil, and that in combination with the land-conversion rates the time frame is much shorter. His research is thorough and clearly presented,

But Sampson goes beyond this doomsday chronicle to describe steps we can take now to stop and protect our food-growing resources. His solution involves creating a sustainable agricultural system through a new land ethics, soil and water conservation techniques, new research on crop yields, and ways to make farmers and rural communities more self-reliant. (Rodale Press, 1981).

***The People's Land*** is a reader on land reform in the United States, edited by Peter Barnes (Rodale Press, 1975).

***The Market for Rural Land*** closely examines how the market works, who participates, what public policies are appropriate, by Robert G. Healy and James L. Short for the Conservation Foundation, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

The **Farmland Project** is a clearinghouse for research and activities on farmland preservation. Its monthly newsletter is essential for keeping up with federal, state, and local goings-on, and includes news stories, calendars of upcoming conferences and the like, and reports on new books and resources. It's a special project of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and the newsletter is free. 1616 H Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 628-1566.

***The Community Land Trust Handbook*** is the best book available on community land trusts, the oldest of which only date to the late 1960s. The idea is that the entire community, as a democratically controlled institution, owns land in trust and makes it available to individual members through long-term leases. The book has case studies, including New Communities in Leesburg, Georgia, and the Community Land Association in Clairfield, Tennessee. There's also a practical guide section on organizing, structure, acquisition, financing, planning, etc. Compiled by the **Institute for Community Economics**, which offers technical assistance, construction assistance, a revolving loan fund, and educational materials for land trusts. 151 Montague City Road, Greenfield, MA 01301; (413) 774-5933 (Rodale Press, 1982).

**American Land Forum** is a group in which government and academic experts come together to discuss major issues concerning use and conservation of American land resources. Publishes a quarterly magazine. 1025 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20005; (202) 347-4516.

**National Land for People** is a group dedicated to advancing the cause of small resident farmer-landowners as the most efficient producers of nutritious food. Based in California, the group is particularly involved in the fight to enforce the reclamation law in the West, but its more general work is also of value to small farmers everywhere. NLP publishes a quarterly journal, *People, Food & Land*, with coverage of current legislation and enforcement efforts, case studies of small farm successes, food features, recipes, book reviews, and so forth. Other publications also available; write for a list: 2348 North Cornelia, Fresno, CA 93711; (209) 233-4727.

## HUNGER

The Southern hunger coalitions, which began mainly as groups advocating for the rights of people entitled to food stamps and other federal assistance, have widely expanded their concerns to all-purpose advocacy for poor people.

**Alabama Coalition Against Hunger**, P.O. Box 409, Auburn, AL 36830; (205) 821-8336.

**Florida Coalition Against Hunger**, 1200 N. Central Avenue, Kissimmee, FL 32741; (305) 846-6423.

**Georgia Citizens' Coalition on Hunger**, 133 Luckie, N.W., Room 601, Atlanta, GA 30303; (404) 659-0878.

**Kentucky Task Force on Hunger**, 1410B Versailles Road, Lexington, KY 40504; (606) 253-3027.

**Louisiana Survival Coalition**, 2020 Jackson Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70113; (504) 523-3663.

**North Carolina Hunger Coalition**, P.O. Box 273, Fayetteville, NC 28302; (919) 483-3661.

**South Carolina Coalition on Hunger**, 1726 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29201; (803) 254-0183.

**Tennessee Hunger Coalition**, 1502 Edgehill Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212; (615) 242-6307.

**Anti-Hunger Coalition of Texas**, 3128 Manor Road, Austin, TX 78723; (512) 474-9921.

***How to Document Hunger in Your Community*** is a 24-page booklet published by the Food Research and Action Center to advise community groups on how to get the facts and figures needed to get policy-makers to respond to the needs of hungry people. $5 from FRAC, 1319 F Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20004; (202) 393-5060.

In some places, community groups have already completed studies of the sort suggested by FRAC. Here's a sampling:

***Hunger in Texas: A State of Need*** uses 24 case studies of poor people to humanize a full report on poverty in the state, including the history and operation of major food programs and suggestions for community action. Published by the Anti-Hunger Coalition of Texas (address in list above).

***Hunger in My Community?*** is a book of readings about hunger in Florida, with special emphasis on children, the elderly, and single-parent families headed by women. $3 from Florida IMPACT, 222 W. Pensacola, No. 127, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

***Hunger in West Virginia*** is the report of a hunger survey in that state that includes a history of hunger and food programs in the U.S., a political analysis of recent legislation affecting food programs, a description of who benefits from food programs, and a discussion of problems one encounters in getting information from official agencies on the hunger problem. West Virginia Food Law Project, P.O. Box 266, Gassaway, WV 26624.

***Hunger in American Cities*** is a Summer, 1983, report from the U.S. Conference of Mayors featuring case studies of eight cities. Among the findings: despite differing local economic conditions and rates of unemployment, all the cities experienced a recent and significant increase in demand for emergency food assistance, which most do not have the resources to meet. 1620 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 293-7330.

For those who want to understand how the federal government "discovered" hunger in the late 1960s and began setting up the federal feeding pro-

grams we still have to live with, the best bet is a 1971 book by Nick Kotz, ***Let Them Eat Promises: The Politics of Hunger in America.*** It won the Pulitzer Prize and can be found in most public libraries. In 1979 Kotz wrote a report on ***Hunger in America*** for the Field Foundation, 100 East 85th Street, New York, NY 10028.

There are many religious groups involved in the fight to end hunger. While the pressing problems of starvation in the Third World deserve and receive much of their attention, domestic hunger is also a concern. ***The Hunger Action Agenda*** is the basic document of the Working Group on Domestic Hunger and Poverty of the National Council of Churches, which has been in the forefront of religious support in the South for both anti-hunger advocacy groups and alternative programs like direct farmer marketing, cooperatives, community gardens and canneries, and so forth. Write the group at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 572, New York, NY 10115; (212) 870-2307.

***Seeds*** is "a magazine by Southern Baptists concerned about hunger," published by the Oakhurst Baptist Church, 222 East Lake Drive, Decatur, GA 30030; (404) 378-3566.

**Bread for the World** calls itself the "only national Christian citizens' movement focusing solely on hunger." An ecumenical group, it focuses especially on lobbying for public policy change at the federal level. *Leaven* is its quarterly newsletter. There are also occasional "background papers." Write for a publication list: 6411 Chillum Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20012; (202) 722-4100.

**Interfaith Action for Economic Justice,** which used to call itself the Interreligious Taskforce on U.S. Food Policy, has broadened its concerns, but still concentrates its energies on influencing federal policy and laws affecting hunger and poverty here and abroad. 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, DC 20002; (202) 543-2800. For current information on federal legislation identified as most critically affecting the hungry, call toll-free (800) 424-7292.

**IMPACT** is also an ecumenical group interested in effecting social justice on a number of fronts. A national group lobbies Congress and state affiliates monitor state action. Publishes regular position papers on hunger and sends out legislative alerts when constituent action is needed. There are local programs in the Southern states of Alabama, Florida, Texas, and West Virginia. Write the national office: 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, DC 20002; (202) 544-8636.

The **World Hunger Education Service** does public education work among organizations and individuals interested in global and domestic hunger and poverty issues, and acts as an information clearinghouse. It publishes *Hunger Notes* 10 times a year ($10 for individuals, $15 for institutions) and miscellaneous other publications. Of special note is the directory ***Who's Involved with Hunger,*** updated in 1982, which lists nearly 400 organizations and agencies in the U.S. working on hunger. $5. 1317 G Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20005; (202) 347-4441.

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## Agrarian Revolt: The Texas Farmers Alliance

*The movement that led millions of American farmers into Populist battle with the rich and powerful in the 1890s had its origins on the Texas frontier of the 1870s. In the early 1880s, the Texas Farmers Alliance evolved from groups of farmers banded together for economic cooperation into a coalescing force for political change. By 1886, the radical branch of the Alliance was ready to push the movement into direct conflict with the old party politics.*

*Meeting in Cleburne in August of that year, the Alliance issued a set of "demands" listing an accumulation of post-Civil War grievances – the land, transportation, and financial issues that became the focus of Populist agitation in the next decade, as well as labor issues, which the People's Party later tended to neglect. Larry Goodwyn, the movement's historian, calls these demands "the first major document of the agrarian revolt."*

We, the delegates to the Grand State Farmers' Alliance of Texas, in convention assembled at Cleburne, Johnson County, Texas, A.D. 1886, do hereby recommend and demand of our State and National governments, according as the same shall come under the jurisdiction of the one or the other, such legislation as shall secure to our people freedom from the onerous and shameful abuses that the industrial classes are now suffering at the hands of arrogant capitalists and powerful corporations. We demand:

1. The recognition by incorporation of trade unions, co-operative stores, and such other associations as may be organized by the industrial classes to improve their financial condition, or to promote their general welfare.

2. That all public school land be held in small bodies, not exceeding three hundred and twenty acres to each purchaser, for actual settlement, on easy terms of payment.

3. That large bodies of land held by private individuals or corporations, for speculative purposes, shall be rendered for taxation at such rates as they are offered to purchasers, on credit of one, two, or three years, in bodies of one hundred and sixty acres or less.

4. That measures be taken to prevent aliens from acquiring title to land in the United States of America, and to force titles already acquired by aliens to be relinquished by sale to actual settlers and citizens of the United States.

5. That the lawmaking powers take early action upon such measures as shall effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural products, prescribing such procedure in trial as shall secure prompt conviction, and imposing such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.

6. That all lands, forfeited by railroads or other corporations, immediately revert to the government and be declared open for purchase by actual settlers, on the same terms as other public or school lands.

7. That fences be removed, by force if necessary, from public or school lands unlawfully fenced by cattle companies, syndicates, or any other form or name of corporation.

8. That the statutes of the State of Texas be rigidly enforced by the attorney-general, to compel corporations to pay the taxes due the State and counties.

9. That railroad property shall be assessed at the full nominal value of the stock on which the railroad seeks to declare a dividend.

10. We demand the rapid extinguishment of the public debt of the United States, by operating the mints to their fullest capacity in coining silver and gold, and the tendering of the same without discrimination to the public creditors of the Nation, according to contract.

11. We demand the substitution of legal tender treasury notes for the issue of the National banks; that the Congress of the United States regulate the amount of such issue by giving to the country a *per capita* circulation that shall increase as the population and business interests of the country expand.

12. We demand the establishment of a National bureau of labor statistics, that we may arrive at a correct knowledge of the educational, moral, and financial condition of the laboring masses of our citizens; and further, that the commissioner of the bureau be a cabinet officer of the United States.

13. We demand the enactment of laws to compel corporations to pay their employees according to contract, in lawful money, for their services, and the giving to mechanics and laborers a first lien upon the product of their labor to the full extent of their wages.

14. We demand the passage of an interstate commerce law, that shall secure the same rates of freight to all persons for the same kind of commodities, according to distance of haul, without regard to amount of shipment; to prevent the granting of rebates; to prevent pooling freights to shut off competition; and to secure to the people the benefit of railroad transportation at reasonable cost.

15. We demand that all convicts shall be confined within the prison walls, and the contract system be abolished.

16. We recommend a call for a National labor conference, to which all labor organizations shall be invited to send representative men, to discuss such measures as may be of interest to the laboring classes. □

*At* ***Southern Exposure*** *we listen to the voices of many people for guidance and inspiration. We want to recapture in Voices From the Past the indomitable spirit of those who have spoken for human dignity, for egalitarianism and for collective social action. We want to celebrate those ideals, for which many have lived and died. We invite you to listen, to join with these voices which harmonize with our own.*

*We welcome submissions from our readers for this feature. Send ideas to: Voices From the Past,* ***Southern Exposure****, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.*

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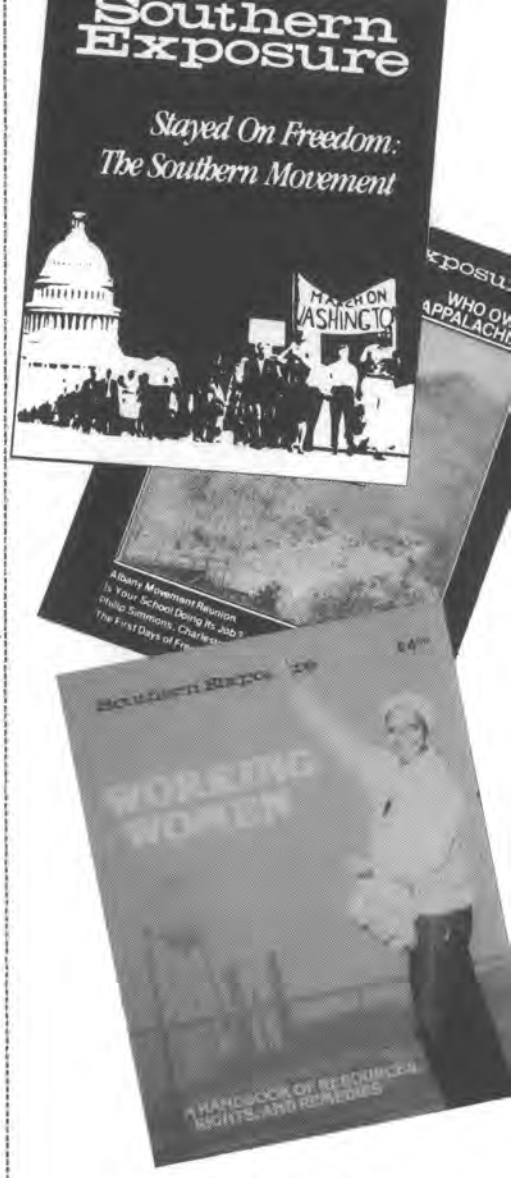


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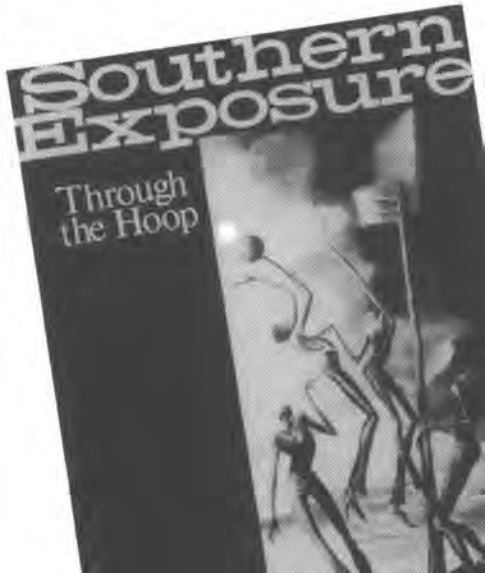

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