

The Kansas City Food Circle

UPDATE

Summer, 2007

OUR OUTREACH EFFORTS EXPAND

2nd Biennial Urban Farms Tour

Once again, the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (KCCUA) is sponsoring an urban farms tour. It's scheduled for Sunday, June 24th from Noon-5 P.M. Eleven farms are taking part in the tour, including 6 Food Circle producer-members: Kansas City Community Farm, Soul & Soil Rainbow Gardens, Root Deep Urban Farm, Troostwood Youth Garden, JJ Farms, and East Wind Gardens.

The tour will begin with a talk on urban agriculture by Katherine Kelly and Dan Dermitzel of KCCUA. This talk starts at 12 p.m. at the Cross-Lines Community Outreach Food Kitchen, 736 Shawnee Avenue, Kansas City, KS. The farm visits themselves are self-guided.

Tickets are \$5 per person or \$12 for a family of three or more and may be purchased from any participating farm before or on the day of the tour. Additional info can be found at kccua.org/uft2007.htm or contact Janet Brown Moss or Joel Wakham by phone at 816-531-6577 or via email at janetbridgeworks@sbcglobal.net
John Kurmann

Record Attendance at Farmers Exhibition

Attendance hit a record at KCFC's 2007 Farmers Exhibition at the Shawnee Civic Center. We estimate that 1120 people came to the event compared to the total of 1000 who attended both 2006 events and 1070 in 2005. The 2007 total was almost twice the attendance at last year's Shawnee event.

Seventy-four percent of people said they were attending for the first time in 2007 compared to 68% in 2006. Fifty-six percent of attendees were Johnson County, KS residents. Six percent came from Wyandotte County, KS. Eighteen percent came from KCMO south of the river and 8% from north of the river. Only about 4% came over from the east or southeast side of the metro area.

While many people cited our newspaper ads, the increased attendance seemed to be related to more word-of-mouth, email networks and our website promotion. Also a number of people cited our ads in parenting magazines, which we used for the first time.

In May we conducted a survey of our farmers to guide our plans for 2008. There was strong sentiment to do the event again at the Shawnee Civic Center, our fourth year, so we have reserved the site for Saturday, March 29, 2008.

There was also sufficient interest among our producers to do a second event, on the east side. It is clear we are not serving eaters on the east side very well, so we will probably do a second event in Independence or Lee's Summit, assuming we can find a suitable site. The date would be Saturday, April 5, 2008.
Craig Volland

Future KC Food Circle Events

The Coordinating Committee concluded that very hot weather in July was suppressing attendance at our annual picnics, so we selected Sunday, September 16 for our 2007 Harvest Picnic. We will send out a letter in August with details. We also decided to move our annual membership meeting from early December to Sunday, January 12, 2008 in order to reduce competition with the busy holiday season. C.V.

Bias in Food Industry Studies

The first systematic review of bias in nutrition research found that studies financed by the food industry are much more likely to produce favorable results than independently financed research. Of 24 industry-financed studies of soft drinks, milk and juices, results from only three were unfavorable. Of 52 studies of the same food items not financed by industry, 20 were unfavorable. The review focused on studies of soft drinks, milk and juice because of their importance to children.

One of the authors noted that industry-sponsored studies can influence the advice health care providers give to their

patients. The review was attacked by an industry trade group who said it was, itself, biased on behalf of activists. The biases reported in this case were similar to those found in 1998 in a review of pharmaceutical research. C.V.

- Source: *The New York Times*

Groundwater Continues to Decline in Kansas

The Kansas Geological Survey reported that early-2007 levels of groundwater show continued declines. Some areas showed drops of two feet or more in the water table. The manager of the largest groundwater management district in western Kansas stated that the rise in corn prices, fueled by the ethanol boom (for vehicle fuel), has caused farmers to plant more corn, which depends on extensive irrigation with ground water. Source: *Rural Papers* newsletter of the Kansas Rural Center. The Kansas Chapter of the Sierra Club has noted that global warming is expected to make long term drought conditions worse in western Kansas, so growing more corn for fuel, or for feed in animal factories, is clearly unsustainable. C.V.

2007 Food & Farm Bill Update

As spring turns to summer, the bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables from local growers is making its way to dinner tables. As a member of the Food Circle, you know about local food and the growers who bring it to your table. This isn't the case for most people who have very little understanding of how and where their food is grown or the powerful influence federal agriculture policy has played for decades in determining how food is produced, priced and distributed.

U.S. Federal government involvement in agriculture began in earnest with the Roosevelt Administration's "New Deal" programs of the 1930s, which arose to deal with a major farm crisis of overproduction: Farmers were producing far more food than people could afford to buy during those Depression years. Though the Depression passed, the overproduction crisis became perennial after World War II as food production increases, spurred on by the industrialization of agriculture and massive petroleum inputs, outpaced population growth. Consequently, the federal government has remained heavily involved in agriculture, passing new legislation, commonly called Farm Bills, every 5-7 years. The last Farm Bill was signed into law in 2002 and the next one is due to be passed into law later this year.

Though only accounting for about 1% of the annual Federal Budget, the next Farm Bill is currently projected to cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$300 billion over the next 5 years. It will encompass a wide swath of programs that impact not only the quality and cost of our food, but also nutrition, soil health, water and air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, wildlife populations, and more.

The 2002 Farm Bill was 420 pages long and contained 10 "Titles," or sections, dealing with different aspects of food

policy. The core of the bill was Title 1, Commodities, which provided payments and loan programs to 20 different crops grown in the U.S. The eight major commodity crops—corn, soybeans, wheat, grain sorghum, barley, oats, cotton and rice—account for 74% of total U.S. cropland and receive 70-80% of government commodity payments.

Regarding commodity payments, small farmer Tom Philpott (www.MaverickFarms.org) wrote the following:

"Between 1995 and 2005, U.S. taxpayers paid farmers almost \$165 billion in direct payments, according to the Environmental Working Group. That averages to approximately \$16 billion per year—the majority of which went to the biggest growers of major crops, such as corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans and rice. The group estimates that in 2002 alone, taxpayers paid more than \$12 billion to about 35 percent of America's farms — this was an average of more than \$17,000 per farm.

"Given that level of commitment, it's worth asking what taxpayers are gaining in return. A well-funded but sound national farm policy should be expected to promote an economically vibrant farm sector that produces a bounty of nutritious food, while carefully managing natural resources. But despite lavish cash outlays, U.S. farm policy fails on all of those fronts."

The Commodity Title is only one component of the Farm Bill needing a major overhaul; the other Titles are Conservation, Agricultural Trade and Aid, Nutrition, Farm Credit, Rural Development, Research, Forestry, Energy, and Miscellaneous. We could start with revising the way we talk about the bill itself, calling it the **Food and Farm Bill** from now on, because that's exactly what it is. Maybe more people would start paying attention then.

Over the next several months, the Congress moves into a critical decision-making process. In June and July, the House Agriculture committees meet, and July thru September the Senate Agriculture committees gather. This is the time to call, write or visit your own Representatives and Senators.

If you don't know who represents you or how to contact them, you can find this information at www.house.gov/writerep and www.senate.gov. If you can only make time to send an email, go to www.HealthyFarmBill.org for a quick-and-easy form to fill out.

For those who live in either Representative Nancy Boyda's or Jerry Moran's congressional district in Kansas, please note that they serve on the House Agriculture Committee, as does Sam Graves of Missouri. Kansas Senator Pat Roberts serves on the Senate Agriculture committee.

Your interest in the Food Circle shows that you are concerned about our food system and understand the need to support innovative, forward-thinking agricultural policies. In a global economy, policies like the Food and Farm Bill

need to be reevaluated to include local and regional programs rather than focusing on large-scale agriculture. Here in the Kansas City Metro area, interest is growing in CSAs and farmers markets. These are valuable resources, but Kansas City needs to build more viable, progressive local food initiatives. Groups such as the KC Food Circle, the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (www.KCCUA.org), and Kansas State University's www.GrowingGrowers.org program—as well as new efforts to develop a local/regional food policy council—are important initiatives that need funding and support at all levels to grow ideas so that food production will become locally-based once again.

1. “How Farm Policy Affects Us All,” by Tom Philpott (www.MotherEarthNews.com/Livestock-and-Farming/2007-06-01/How-Farm-Policy-Affects-Us-All.aspx)

Learn More

To take action and better understand the Food and Farm Bill, visit these resources.

“A Fair Farm Bill for America” from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy:
www.AgObservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=97623

The Kansas Rural Center (KansasRuralCenter.org) maintains an up-to-date local advocacy and policy page and highlights the efforts of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition/Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, www.MSAWG.org.

The American Farmland Trust (www.Farmland.org) has an action center along with a comprehensive overview of the 10 bills on the hill.

The Farm and Food Policy Project (www.FarmAndFoodProject.org) has written a report, endorsed by over 400 organizations, outlining ideas to create a greater balance in public policies and ultimately the farm and food system.

The Ag Observatory (www.AgObservatory.org) at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy has a newsletter and white papers discussing 6 parts of the Food and Farm Bill.

Environmental Defense is leading a Healthy Farms, Healthy Food campaign. (www.EnvironmentalDefense.org)

www.FarmPolicy.com is a daily summary of news relating to U.S. farm policy.

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.SustainableAgriculture.net) and its partners play an important role in monitoring and informing the public and the media about how Farm Bill and other federal agriculture programs, such as the National Organic Program, are delivered, how spending is distributed, which constituencies

are being served and what results are being achieved. They are working to ensure that partners, farmers and communities throughout the country are informed of the programs and funding streams available to help them achieve economic, environmental and social goals.
Sarah Shmigelsky and J.K.

Coming Home to Eat: Report on a Prototype Conference

It's time to take strategic action to create a sustainable, regionally-based, community-owned food system.

This was the conclusion expressed by speakers and participants at the "Coming Home to Eat: Creating a Sustainable Regional Food System – A Call for Leadership" conference, which was held February 2-3, in Kansas City, Missouri. Sponsors of this prototype conference included the Kansas City Food Circle, the Greens of Kansas City, ReEnergizeKC, J-14 Enterprises, Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture, and Kansas City Community Farm.

The planning team was very gratified by the conference attendance of 150; we had hoped for forty to fifty. Our take on this amazing turnout is that more and more people are realizing the risks posed to our economic and food systems by petroleum depletion, global warming and climate change.

The conference opened with presentations by Ken Warren, Managing Director of the Land Institute (www.LandInstitute.org), James Glavin of the Energy Awareness Group at the University of Missouri-KC, and John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus, Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri. Together, their talks explained the dependence of the industrial agriculture system on cheap and abundant petroleum (oil and natural gas) supplies as well as the evidence that global petroleum production will likely peak soon and begin to decline, demonstrating the pressing need to re-localize our food supply in the Greater Kansas City area. Two panels and breakout sessions dealt with the tools, resources, and models needed to do this, and the concluding plenary session produced promising action steps. Twenty people signed up to serve on a newly formed steering committee, and two individuals, Gretchen Burak and Sarah Shmigelsky, volunteered to assist in coordinating the group.

Now, the challenge is to implement the action steps proposed at the conference! A likely first project for the steering committee (in addition to becoming more structured), will be to launch projects to increase support to existing efforts covered by the first of the two conference panels: food circles, urban farming, community gardens, and edible landscaping. For example, this new group could assist the KC Food Circle in its planned program to promote and organize neighborhood buying clubs to source

regionally-produced and processed organic foods. Another idea is to form a task group to advocate and promote the Food Not Lawns concept, originally developed in Oregon (www.FoodNotLawns.com), throughout Greater Kansas City.

Stimulated by the conference, the concept emerged to offer a strategic vision and goal to reduce the percentage of food being imported from outside the larger Kansas City region such that, over time, the region will become largely self-reliant in its food supply. The coordinators offer the following:

In order to promote the creation of a sustainable food system within the Kansas City region, our goal is for a minimum of 60% of the food consumed in 2025 to be produced, processed, marketed, and distributed within a radius of roughly 150 miles in all directions.

Please contact Ben Kjelshus at 816-767-8873 if you're interested in becoming involved in this effort.
Ben Kjelshus and J.K.

But what about sweetness?

What would life be like without some sweetness now and then (or everyday, in my case)? Thankfully, we won't have to find out, even if we're determined to eat locally-produced foods as much as possible. Several Food Circle producer-members offer honey: Bread of Life, Good Natured Family Farms, the Organic Way Farm, Pickings & Pumpkins, LLC, and Pisciotta Farms. Other local honeys are available at farmers markets and in area grocery stores, including Ambrose Bee Pharm, Busy Bee Acres, Cooper's Honey, and Robert Burns. I especially like wildflower honeys, with their rich, complex flavors.

One of our members, Share-Life Farms, produces sweet sorghum syrup. Also, Sandhill Farm (www.SandhillFarm.org), a vendor at our Expos, sells sorghum syrup through the following locations in Greater KC: Whole Foods (91st & Metcalf in Overland Park), Wild Oats (only the 43rd & Main store), and both Nature's Pantry and Rainbow Natural Foods in Independence. They also ship nationwide.

Neither honey or sorghum syrup will work well in all circumstances, though, particularly when a recipe was created to use "sugar," which is most often made from sugarcane. Sugarcane isn't well-suited to local weather conditions so it'll never be local, but sugar crystals can also be made from sugar beets. Unfortunately, I'm unaware of anyone trying to grow them locally for sugar production. If you know of a farm that is, please let me know.

So, if you have a recipe that calls for sugar, does it matter what brand you buy? You likely won't be surprised when I recommend buying sugars that are certified organic, but you may not be aware that there are important differences between the various certified organic sugars on the market. Heck, there's even C&H brand organic sugar now, a sure sign of the booming popularity of organics, but I wouldn't buy from them unless I was in a real pinch.

If, like me, your first priority is getting the organic sugar that's grown closest to KC, it appears that the only company growing sugar organically in the continental U.S. right now is Florida Crystals (www.FloridaCrystals.com). They offer sugar crystals that are like familiar table sugar (except they don't bleach all the color out) plus brown and powdered sugars. Please note that they sell both certified organic and so-called "natural" sugars, so make sure you pay attention to the labeling to get the kind you want.

Another commonly-available brand, Wholesome Sweeteners (www.WholesomeSweeteners.com), offers a more complete line of organic sugars grown in Paraguay that are Fair Trade Certified: Refined, Refined Packets, Sucanat, Light and Dark Brown, Powdered, and Icing Sugar. They even sell Molasses that's certified organic and Fair Trade. In addition, they offer organic Turbinado and Demerara sugars, though they're not fair trade certified. Please note that they also sell products that are "natural" and fair trade certified but **not** organic.

Finally, Rapunzel (www.Rapunzel.com) offers a unique sugarcane sweetener, Rapadura Whole Cane Sugar, which has had none of the minerals removed during processing. This gives it a strong and complex flavor and may make it a healthier choice than refined sugars. It's grown in Brazil, and, while not independently fair trade certified, Rapunzel does have their own Hand in Hand™ Fair Trade program. Rapadura comes in a form that's similar to refined sugar crystals as well as powdered. Unfortunately, it's shipped from Brazil to Europe for processing before being exported to the U.S., so it has a lot of food miles on it.

If you have a favorite non-local sweetener option, please send me an email at willowjohn@gmail.com. J.K.



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