



It's About the Food

An Essay by Paul Williams

You wouldn't expect to find foodies on the front lines of the Revolution—unless that's the name of a trendy new bistro with a long waiting list. And you won't find food faddists heading for the barricades over a broken *buerre blanc* or stringy *arugula*. Yet often without realizing it, these gourmands are sauce-pan subversives, striking at the very heart of American agri-business, with their demands for fresh, premium ingredients of local distinction. For the most part, they don't want what industrial agriculture has to sell—the GMO corn and iceberg lettuce and food-like cheese product—but they often don't have ready access to local, conscientiously raised meats and produce.

All great cuisine, like all politics, is local. Europe's stunning variety of food styles (not to mention those of Asia) is no less than the grand sum of a thousand thousand local cooks working with local ingredients to create regionally-distinct bills-of-fare. Well into the 20th Century, even in the industrial world, transportation was slow and refrigeration nonexistent, so most perishable foods—including meat and fresh dairy products—had to be produced locally. Chefs and home cooks alike knew where their ingredients came from, which farmers had the best lamb or asparagus, which dairy had the best cream. This, in turn, spurred farmers to produce better lamb and asparagus and cream. So, while the cooks of Europe refined their great cuisines, European farmers kept pace through selective

breeding and innovations in agriculture. They learned to become efficient by working small farms, frequently on rough terrain with poor soils. They terraced steep river valleys to plant vine-

poultry—the sort we sometimes call “free-range”—has spurred the creation of the “Label Rouge” certification program, under which almost one-third of French chickens are raised outdoors, in small flocks, and come to market with their source cited on the package. Parisians can trace birds back to their origins and come to know the farms that produced them. It is a kind of connection sadly lacking between American farmers and urban consumers—and not one that the agricultural giants want to see made.

Despite some regional distinctions—in New Orleans and the Southwest, for instance—American cuisine is in its infancy, and most Americans eat not wisely but too well. Sustainable agriculture can help change that, for it is, first and last, about food, its quality, safety, and regional diversity.

Continued on page 4



“There is no great cuisine without great farming.”
—Kristin Gibson

Photo by Gwen Roland, SSARE

yards and control erosion, bred the cyanide out of almonds, raised sheep and goats where cattle couldn't graze, and generally got the most out of what they had, each farm eager to boast of its unique tomatoes or olives or pears. And, but of course, its wine.

That's still the way it is in many parts of the world—the parts we call “under developed”—and was everywhere, in fact, until about the fourth decade of the 20th Century. Even in the late 1980s, in a city the size of Beijing, the vegetables in the market in Haidian District came from the commune or one of the hundreds of tiny private plots just outside town. And in France today, the grassroots demand for full-flavored

INDEX

IT'S ABOUT THE FOOD	1
EVENTS	2
STAFF SPOTLIGHT: STEVE DIVER	2
NEW AND UPDATED ATTRA PUBLICATIONS	3
NEW USDA OFFICE TO AID MINORITY AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS	3
BRITISH STUDY SOWS “SEEDS OF DOUBT” ABOUT SUCCESS OF GM CROPS IN U.S.	3
ATTRA SPEAKERS BUREAU	3
OPPORTUNITIES	4
NEW ATTRA WEB SITE DEBUTS IN DECEMBER	4



Staff Spotlight: Steve Diver

The Agriculture Specialists who write ATTRA publications are generally a prolific bunch, and that's certainly true of [Steve Diver](#). In addition to his several publications, Steve has written scores of standard case letters and is regularly asked to act as a technical reviewer for other ATTRA publications. And that doesn't include his articles in magazines or presentations at conferences.

Steve's specialty is horticulture, but his interests and research have ranged widely in sustainable agriculture to include agronomy, organic farming, alternative farming systems, greenhouse production, and composts. In fact, if you want to talk composts, compost teas, or composting systems, Steve Diver is the one to call. (Steve also likes to keep the rest of us in the office up-to-date on breaking research, and his e-mail lists of reference materials are a regular feature in our in-boxes.)

Travel has been a hallmark of Steve's career. Following his graduate work at Oklahoma State University and a stint as an Extension Horticulturist in Oklahoma, he directed an organic farm in Missouri, before coming to NCAT's ATTRA project in 1989. Since then, his

research has taken him to India, Russia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the islands of Bermuda, as well as across the United States.

Closer to home, Steve is a committee member of the Botanical Garden Society of the Ozarks, the 2002 President of the Arkansas State Horticultural Society, a board member of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Horticulture Industries Show, and a member of the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.

Steve's broad scope of interests, his commitment to research, and his steady output of publications typify the efforts of the ATTRA project to remain America's first source for information and technical assistance concerning sustainable agriculture.

Events

October 25-26. Special Forest Products Product and Marketing Conference, "Exploring Markets for Food, Floral, Medicinal and Craft Products," sponsored by USDA Forest and Extension Services and various services and departments of Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Indiana. Drury Inn, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. For registration and complete information, contact: Julie Rhoads, 573-882-3234. E-Mail: <RhoadsJ@missouri.edu>.

October 31–November 2. 10th National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference™, "Thinking Outside the Box Sustainably," sponsored by Small Farm Today® magazine.

NCAT-ATTRA Agriculture Specialist [Janet Bachmann](#) (farmers' markets, cut flowers) will be among the speakers. Boone County Fairgrounds, Columbia, Missouri. For registration and complete information, call: 800-633-2535, or see the Small Farm Today Web site, <www.smallfarmtoday.com>.

November 6-8. "The Sustainable Dairy: Techniques, Technologies, and Profits." Middle Tennessee Experiment Station, Spring Hill, Tennessee. Sponsored by NCAT-ATTRA, the Universities of Arkansas and Tennessee, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the theme of this conference is "educators working with producers to enhance farm sustainability." It will feature

NCAT-ATTRA Program Specialists Ron Morrow and Ann Wells. For more information, contact: Ann Wells, 800-346-9140, <annw@ncatark.uark.edu>.

November 7–9. Ecolabels Conference, sponsored by Tufts University and USDA. Conference will look at the growing use of "ecolabels," their credibility and standards, as well as what role government should play in regulating ecolabeling. Contact: Ecolabels Conference, Conference Bureau, 108 Packard Ave., Medford, MA 02155. FAX: 617/627-3856. E-mail: <ecolabels@tufts.edu>. Web: <<http://www.nutrition.tufts.edu/conted/ecolabels>>.

November 8-10. Washington State University NW Symposium on Organic and Biologically-Intensive Agriculture (8 November) and Tilth Producers Annual Conference (8-10 November), Yakima Convention Center, 10 North 8th Street, Yakima, Washington. Organic producers from around the state will be participating in workshops addressing many facets of organic production. For more information, contact: Nancy, 206-442-7620. E-mail: <nancy@tilthproducers.org>.

November 10. New York Pasture Association Annual Conference. This year's conference will focus on facts and tools farmers need to advocate pasture-based production and small farms in their communities. For more information, contact: NYPA, P.O. Box 94,

Nichols, NY 13812. E-mail: nypasez@yahoo.com.

November 15–16. "Future Farms 2002: A Supermarket of Ideas." Conference and Trade Show. NCED Marriott Conference Center. Norman, Oklahoma. Sponsored by the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. More than 50 sessions on opportunities in crops, livestock and poultry, innovative marketing, and value-added enterprise. For complete information, contact: Kerr Center, PO Box 599, Poteau, OK 74953; 1-918-647-9123. E-mail: <mailbox@kerrcenter.com>; Web: <www.kerrcenter.com>.

November 17-19. "The Soul of Agriculture: New Movements in New England Food and Farming," on the campus of the University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, sponsored by Univ. of New Hampshire Sustainability Programs, Center for Respect of Life and Environment, Humane Society of the United States, Northeast SAWG, New England Small Farm Institute, and the Great Bay Food Company. Emphasis of the conference is on food and food systems and on connecting farmers and consumers. For complete information, contact: El Farrell, 603-862-4088. E-Mail: <El.Farrell@unh.edu>. Web: <<http://www.sustainableunh.unh.edu>>.

New and Updated ATTRA Publications

- [Agroforestry Overview](#) (updated)
- [Constructed Wetlands](#) (updated)
- [Creating an Organic Production and Handling System Plan: A Guide to Organic Plan Templates](#) (new)
- [Echinacea as an Alternative Crop](#) (updated)
- [Edible Soybean Production and Marketing](#) (new)
- [Flame Weeding for Vegetable Crops](#) (new)
- [Freeze Protection for Solar-powered Livestock Watering Systems](#) (new)
- [Ginseng, Goldenseal, and Other Native Roots](#) (updated)
- [Low-cost Passive Solar Greenhouses](#) (new)
- [Organic Alternatives to Treated Lumber](#) (new)
- [Organic Plug and Transplant Production](#) (updated)
- [Organic Pumpkin and Winter Squash Production](#) (new)
- [Poultry Processing Facilities for Use by Independent Producers in the Southern Region](#) (new)
- [Stored Grain Pest Management](#) (new)
- [Woody Ornamentals for Cut Flower Growers](#) (new)

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New USDA Office to Aid Minority and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

In September 2002, the USDA announced the establishment of the Office of Minority and Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Assistance (MSDA). This new office, operated under the USDA's Farm Service Agency, will provide minority and socially disadvantaged farmers with another avenue to seek technical assistance and information, especially as

it relates to USDA loan applications.

The MSDA operates a toll-free telephone help-line to answer questions about loan applications filed in local offices and other technical issues. To contact the MSDA:

Phone: 1-866-538-2610 (toll free)

Fax: 1-888-211-7286 (toll free)

E-mail: MSDA@wdc.usda.gov

ATTRA Speakers Bureau

Do you need an expert to address a critical topic at your next conference or workshop? If you do, NCAT-ATTRA agriculture specialists are available to make presentations on a wide range of subjects concerning sustainable agriculture. Among them are:

- Whole-Farm Planning for Livestock Production
- Holistic Management
- Organic Certification
- Pastured Poultry Production
- Integrated Pest Management
- Sheep and Goat Production
- Water Quality Issues
- Organic Livestock Production
- Grazing Management
- Value-added Marketing
- Agroforestry
- and many others

For a complete list of speakers, their bios and topic areas, see the ATTRA web site at <http://www.attra.ncat.org>. There is never a fee for our speakers, but conferences and workshops will be asked to assist with travel and accommodation expenses. To request a speaker or for more information, contact Bill Sutherland, NCAT-ATTRA, P.O. Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702, 479-442-9824 / 800-346-9140 (toll free), bills@ncatark.uark.edu.

British Study Sows "Seeds of Doubt" About Success of GM Crops in U.S.

The Soil Association, Britain's largest organic farming group, recently released its report on GM crops in North America. Entitled "Seeds of Doubt," the report calls the adoption of genetically engineered crops in the United States an "economic disaster."

Based on interviews with farmers and a review of the independent research, the report concludes that "GM contamination has severely disrupted GM-free production including organic farming, destroyed trade and undermined the competitiveness of North American agriculture overall."

Contamination by GM crops is the greatest problem, the report states, and has "undermined the viability of the whole North American farming industry." By example, the report cites the situation in September 2000, when one percent of unapproved GM corn contaminated almost half the national corn supply and cost the Aventis company nearly \$1 billion. The report points out that, despite the claims of GMO advocates, the profitability of farms devoted to GM crops has fallen since 1996, in part because of the increased cost of seed and the increased use of herbicides, and in

part because of the collapse of export markets for GM crops. This has led to increased government subsidies, bringing the total cost of GM crops to the U.S. economy to at least \$12 billion from 1999 to 2001.

The report also examines the thorny legal issues that have emerged around GM crops, including the case of Monsanto suing a farmer for patent infringement when his crop was contaminated by a Monsanto GMO.

For more about the Soil Association report, see the Association's Web site, <http://www.soilassociation.org/sa/saweb.nsf/getinvolved/geneng.html>.



Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas
P. O. Box 3657 • Fayetteville, AR 72702
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1-800-411-3222 (Spanish only)

A project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology

Opportunities

Organic farmer needed. SEEDS, a nonprofit market-gardening business employing urban youth in Durham, NC, is seeking a FARM COORDINATOR to manage its Durham Innercity Gardeners farm. Minimum of three years experience in organic production required. Bilingual Spanish-English fluency preferred but not required. Part-time, 28 hours/week. For more information, contact: SEEDS, 706 Gilbert Street, Durham, NC 27701, or e-mail <lclayton@gofairtrade.net>. No phone calls, please.

New ATTRA Web Site Debuts In December

After December 15, you'll find something new at www.attra.ncat.org — ATTRA's redesigned Web site. Everything you've come to expect from the ATTRA site will still be there, plus many new features. You will still be able to read and download ATTRA publications, keep abreast of upcoming events, and find out about programs and policies that bear on sustainable agriculture. But the new site also offers quicker access to our publications, allows you to submit research questions on-line, and provides links to other organizations that make the ATTRA site your electronic portal to the realm of sustainable agriculture in America.

Continued from page 1

But food is also business. It is in production, marketing, and distribution that sustainable agriculture must win its biggest battles. Winning a sustainable share of the market means producing a dependable supply of the foods that discriminating cooks covet. But restaurateurs, especially, too often find frustration in trying to rely on local producers for regular deliveries. To sustain itself, sustainable agriculture must not only offer products that surpass those of factory farms in quality, it must also rival them in reliability and efficiency of delivery.

One of the front lines in the campaign to bring the bounty of sustainable

Through the new Web site, you will get regular reports on funding opportunities, be able to contact us to schedule speakers for conferences and workshops, and find out what's happening at USDA. You'll hear from farmers and ranchers who have found ways to make sustainable agriculture work, and you'll have a way to tell us what you want from the site, as we continue to refine it.

When you log on to www.attra.ncat.org after December 15, please take a few minutes to navigate the site, then hit the "Comments" button and tell us what you think about it.

We're looking forward to hearing from you.

agriculture to America is in the kitchens of professional chefs and serious home cooks. Foodies can be among farmers' most powerful allies, but only if their expectations are both raised and, more importantly, met.

ATTRAnews

Teresa Maurer, ATTRA Project Manager

Paul Williams, ATTRAnews Editor

**Gail Hardy, Art and Production
September 2002**

ATTRAnews is the quarterly newsletter of Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas. It is distributed free throughout the United States to farmers, ranchers, Cooperative Extension agents, educators, and others interested in sustainable agriculture. ATTRA is a primary source of information about sustainable agriculture in the United States. ATTRA is funded through the USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service and is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), a private, non-profit organization that since 1976 has championed sustainable technologies and community development that protect natural resources and assist people, especially the economically disadvantaged, to become self-reliant.

