

# The Land Stewardship Letter

Keeping the Land and People Together



# Letter

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## Picking the Planet We Want

*One fruit produced by globalization could be a food and farming system more accountable to local communities.*



Abilio Velasquez picks coffee beans on his family's farm in Honduras. Some of those beans are destined for the Midwest, where his brother and sister-in-law market the coffee. Such relationships are giving "local food" a whole new meaning. See page 22 for more on this venture. *(photo contributed)*

Food production occupies 40 percent of the planet's land surface, scientists revealed in early December at a meeting of the American Geophysical Union. In 1700, just 7 percent of the globe was used for farming. Today, an area roughly the size of South America is devoted to crop production alone. Farmland grew by 12.4 million acres between 1992 and 2002, according to the United Nations.

With all this talk about our society

Pick, see page 20...

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moving into the post-agrarian age, the fact remains that we must all eat to live, and the growing amount of acreage devoted to producing sustenance is proof of that. We also all need clean air and water to live. Burgeoning demands on our land threaten these critical elements of the environment.

Proponents of corporate-controlled industrial agriculture argue that this growing pressure on our agricultural lands means we must push even harder for a brand of globalization where whoever can produce the cheapest commodities should do exactly that. These intensively managed breadbaskets will become “sacrifice zones” environmentally, goes the scenario. In return for sacrificing their land and communities, these communities will make money selling food all over the world, say globalization’s boosters. Such thinking is being used to justify a host of sins in the name of global competitiveness and “feed

## Pick of the Planet



the world” evangelism. Everything from multimillion gallon manure lagoons in rural communities to eroded cropland to contaminated water are all part of the price we pay for being part of this drive to globalize.

This issue of the *Land Stewardship Letter* describes a few examples of people who aren’t willing to allow this faceless force of “globalization” to decide how their food is raised where and by whom. Ironically, they are getting their point

across by embracing a form of globalization—but this globalization is not of the same pedigree being led around on a leash by the Cargills, ADMs, Monsanto and ConAgra of the world. This one consists of farmers and consumers creating relationships with like-minded farmers and consumers all over the world. They are sharing ideas, sharing food, and sharing a common attachment to the land that a multinational corporation or a high-level trade mission just can’t quite attain. This *LSL* shows people using local democracy to fight for their land and its resources, farmers traveling the world to learn what they have in common with other agrarians, and a family putting a new twist on what is considered “local food.”

Finally, Frances Moore Lappé draws it all together by showing us how all of these stories from around the world are not “random acts of sanity.” Rather, they are part of a growing movement to inject values into our global market.

— Brian DeVore

## A different kind of trade mission

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** These days, it’s not unusual to run across a farmer who has some sort of international experience. These agrarian internationalists seem to fall into three broad categories: ones that go to places like Sweden or New Zealand to learn about innovative systems like deep straw hog production or rotational grazing; those that take their own techniques abroad to help farmers in Third World countries or from the former Soviet Block learn; and those that join with other farmer-activists from all over the world to raise awareness about unjust government policies and corporate practices.

Audrey Arner would comfortably fit into all three categories. During the past 10 years, Arner, who raises grass-based beef with her husband Richard Handeen on 240 acres in western Minnesota, has traveled to Cuba to learn about its organic farming system and to Europe to see firsthand the way sustainable farmers market and label their products. She and Handeen have also hosted a farmer from Costa Rica, who is now implementing some of what he learned on his own family’s operation. A year ago, the couple attended the Terra Madre “Slow Food” conference in Italy, where they shared their own experiences about developing local food systems and learned about similar initiatives arising globally. In July, Arner went to Scotland during the meeting of the G-8 Summit.

Arner, a former Land Stewardship Project organizer in our Montevideo office, recently talked to the *Land Stewardship Letter* about her experiences.

*LSL:* The term globalization has become a dirty word within some family farm and sustainable agriculture circles. But recently an argument has been made that it can also create a lot of positive connections with other farmers all over the world.

*Arner:* It makes me think about the Malian cotton farmer who came to visit

LSP and other organizations like ours last spring. Alimata Traoré came to us because of the impoverished situation of cotton farmers in her country and surrounding countries brought about by the globalization of commodity markets, and U.S. commodities flooding the global market. This type of globalization was suppressing prices for farmers in her

country to the point where they were unable to sell their cotton crop. Cotton farmers in her country can’t even afford to buy medicine for their sick children, or send their kids to school. That type of globalization, which is based on serving multinational corporations, is literally costing lives.

That’s one aspect of globalization, but globalization is also what brought her to us and what increased our level of awareness of this issue. As a result, members of groups like LSP and Oxfam are contacting Senators and Representatives in Congress and letting them know that subsidizing mega-cropping operations in this country at the expense of farms in countries like Mali is not acceptable. We aren’t just sticking out heads in the sand and focusing on our own communities.

Globalization is also creating something positive in that regionally people are responding by creating new products, or bringing back old products, or preserving genetics and traditional means of processing. Extreme globalization tends to destroy anything that has a local or regional flavor to it. So people all over

Trade see page 21 ...