

Engaging the Congregation

How can your congregation practice what your faith teaches about food? The resources in this document can help you.

They include:

An overview of “What our Faiths Teach us About Food and Eating,” by Rev. Clare Butterfield

“A description of the New Age of Agriculture: Where We Are Now,” by Br. David Andrews, CSC

“A Vision for a Better Future,” by Shireen Pishdadi

A compilation of “Good Practices by Congregations,” by Arlin Wasserman

What our Faiths Teach us about Food and Eating Rev. Clare Butterfield

God also said, 'I give you [the human] all plants that bear seed everywhere on earth, and every tree bearing fruit which yields seed: they shall be yours for food. All green plants I give for food to the wild animals, to all the birds of heaven, and to all reptiles on earth, every living creature.' So it was; and God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:29-31)

We celebrate God's creation of a self-sustaining web of life in which plants, animals, land, water, air, and human beings are interwoven. Consideration should be given to methods of agriculture that protect and heal the web of life.

The three Abrahamic traditions speak to the manner in which food is grown, harvested and eaten. The production of food has always been and remains one of the most significant of human activities, and our ability to take food from the Earth reminds us that our existence is contingent upon what some of our traditions would call grace.

The All Merciful God! It is He who has taught the Quran. It is He who has created man. It is He who has taught him expression. The sun and the moon are in measured course. And to Him do the stars and the trees bow themselves down. And the heaven has He raised. And He has set the balance of all things, so that you do not transgress the just balance. So establish weights and measures with justice. And you shall not by fraud diminish the balance. And the earth has He laid down for all living creatures. Therein is abundant fruit and date-palms with plenteous sheaths, and grains with husk. And sweet-scented basil. Then which of your Lord's blessings will any of you deny? (Al-Qur'an 55:1-13)

While there is some disagreement among our traditions regarding what makes food sacred, we agree on the following:

- What we eat and how we eat is significant to faith
- Food is central to community celebrations, from the Shabbat meal to the holy meal of communion to the breaking of the fast at Ramadan
- Ensuring that all might eat - sharing food with the hungry
- Justice for the people who grow, process and prepare our food
- Compassion for farm animals
- Caring for the earth so that it will continue to provide an abundance of food for the health and survival of all creation.

* Drawn from *What Makes Food Sacred: A Study in 8 Dimensions*, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, ed., prepared as a discussion document for the 2006 Sacred Foods Conference.

The welcome table, the place left empty for the stranger who might come, the requirement of hospitality, these themes infuse our faith traditions. They also emphasize that as food is central to our daily lives it is also central to the celebration of our faiths.

Many of our traditions mandate that only certain foods be eaten and prohibit others. Most suggest that food is to be enjoyed in a moderate manner so that we may maintain healthy bodies. All of our faiths oblige us to feed the hungry and to share our means with the less fortunate members of our society. The call to work for justice in our faith traditions The call to justice in our faith traditions tell us that we must care about the people who grow, process and prepare our food, and not require them to endure risks and dangers that we would not choose to endure ourselves. The mandate of compassion extends from us to the animals we eat, where our faiths permit the eating of animals, and require that we acknowledge this sacrifice of life with solemnity and care. And as our faiths teach us that we are here as stewards of this Earth, they teach us that we must learn to grow food in harmony with the Earth's natural ecosystems..

And he told them this parable:

"There was a rich man whose land yielded heavy crops. He debated with himself: "What am I to do? I have not the space to store my produce. This is what I will do," said he: "I will pull down my storehouses and build them bigger. I will collect in them all my corn and other goods, and then say to myself, 'Man, you have plenty of good things laid by, enough for many years: take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'" But God said to him, "You fool, this very night you must surrender your life; you have made your money—who will get it now?" That is how it is with the man who amasses wealth for himself and remains a pauper in the sight of God (Luke 12:16-21)

Food is sacred because it is a gift of God, of the Earth and of the many labors that bring it from the Earth to our tables. The act of eating is sacred because it reveals our interdependence with the web of life. The Sacred Foods Project offers your congregation resources and ideas to revivify sacred practices around food, appropriate for your tradition. We invite you to consider where your food comes from, under what conditions it is grown, processed and prepared and how it gets to your plate. We invite you to explore your own traditions around sacred meals and to celebrate them with new awareness of the fragility and interdependence of life. We invite you to think about your relationship to the field, farmer, farm-worker, truck driver, farm animals, soil, rain, and to God who provided them all.

The New Age of Agriculture: Where We Are Now

Br. David Andrews, CSC

Some things never change! So goes the adage, and it is usually stated about agriculture, really the world's oldest profession. Farming is the major work of the world today with over a billion farmers and most of those are women. As the world becomes increasingly a village it also has moved to recognize that feeding the village is a major challenge. Bill Gates, the Rockefeller Foundation and many multinationals want to feed it in one way. Via Campesina, proponents of sustainable development, grassroots organizations and many non-governmental organizations think that there is another way to feed the world.

The dominant approach in modern agriculture is top-down, focused on efficiency as the central theme. It is the industrial model bequeathed to us as part of the industrial age. But the major paradigm for self understanding has taken us beyond the industrial era of the multinationals. We are in a new age of agriculture that can be called the post-industrial age or the post-modern age. It is the age of quantum agriculture, of sustainability, of democratic, bottom up approaches. We are beginning to merge deep ecology with deep economy.

The New Age of Agriculture is facing significant challenges but there are also significant opportunities. ...Fast-food giants are trying to get a foot hold on food provisioning in developing countries before those countries learn more about the negative health impacts such food often has on eaters. Big food retailers like Carrefour, Wal-Mart and Nestles continue to consolidate their systematic control of the global food system, driving less "efficient" operations out of business. Meanwhile the WTO continues to promote trade rules written for big business. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) continues to warn about trusting in a food system of small producers that are potential carriers of avian influenza, e-coli or other food born illnesses. Their approach is to advocate for concentration and efficiency. (See the publication "Livestock's Long Shadow" CITATION?)

Alternative food systems have found their advocates in a new agricultural vision that tries to put previously disparate and disconnected approaches together. These might be viewed as "sustainable" agriculture, which is comprised of a food system that links economic profit, environmental benefit, social justice, actions that are culturally appropriate and humane animal husbandry. This kind of approach appreciates local, organic, and natural food.

The new agriculture promotes human health. Each of the elements is seen as a necessary connection in a new agricultural system. The new agriculture is global by being local first. It appreciates food webs rather than supply chains. It is being fostered by networks around the world who work regionally in a new democratic food system, a system of food democracy that is finding distinctive expression in new governance systems proclaiming the people's food sovereignty.

In Canada the development of food charters, at the municipal level, begins with citizens, city councils, non-governmental organizations articulating a mandate for a community of the food preferences of that community. In the United States food policy councils are being created at the state level by departments of agriculture or governors; at the county level by selectmen and women or representatives of county government. These food policy councils tend to find ways to bring food governance to a wider band of stake holders: institutional purchasers, school and health officials, non governmental organizations, private companies.

Representatives of these diverse sectors have a decade long experience of working on food procurement and provisioning, small scale processing facilities are being brought back on line or are being retrofitted for the new community based food system. Economists are re-discovering the multiplier effect of local economic activity and import replacement is being practiced in place of smokestack chasing as the major venture of state economic development efforts. These efforts in the north, to link food sovereignty, local markets and new governance systems are being developed around the world as well.

In Asia and Africa citizens are resisting biotechnology and are defending the practice of saving seeds. Large numbers of farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists are claiming that their well honed local knowledge can stand up well over and against Western technological discoveries. A summit in Mali recently drew thousands to defend the right to food sovereignty. In Turin, Italy many thousands have gathered several times to proclaim the benefits of slow food. In Berlin in April of 2007 hundreds will explore the theme of slow trade and fair food with an alternative vision being framed contrasting the approaches of free trade of the WTO with a vision of fair trade.

Statistically the new agriculture is a miniscule part of the global agricultural production system. While it seemingly lacks power and profit, it benefits from passion. In the face of looming crises in fossil fuels, climate change, fiscal limitations, it may very well become the requisite alternative to the dominant industrial mode.

A Vision for a Better Future

Shireen Pishdadi

A new vision must challenge our premises and lifestyle so that we can develop true sustainability on an Earth that exists in a delicate and profound balance. This vision holds as a principle that agriculture is a renewable resource when it works within the wisdom and harmony of nature.

When local communities are empowered, caring for one's neighbor becomes a reality that allows homelessness and poverty to be addressed by real people, face-to-face. When local communities are empowered, congregations can take root once more in their communities and bring guidance to human activity and return the concept of sacredness to food and celebrations.

Trade is an essential component of human activity and therefore cannot cease to exist. But trade can exist among equal partners - between healthy, sustainable local communities around the world. The point of local vs. global is not the extent to which human economic activity occurs, but about the consolidation of power and ownership of resources.

Rural communities have rights to pollution-free environments and a decent living standard over and above the profit goals of corporations. Farmers must be empowered to act as stewards and reclaim the knowledge required to return agriculture to a renewable resource once known to humankind.

Urban agriculture is a necessary part of the equation since the cities are an increasingly significant part of societies. A local food infrastructure can be facilitated through domestic laws and policies. Rooftop gardens, water conservation, renewable energy, recycling, decreasing waste, urban gardens, community kitchens, local businesses, all could be part of the picture.

The retail sector is part of the web of an economy and therefore contributes to the well being of a society. Local retailers can be empowering to the community and help to keep food dollars circulating within the community.

Today the government is directly supporting multinational corporations, and is fast becoming assimilated into those corporation's structures. In an alternative vision, the government, as an institution to serve the people, would do what is best for the local society by supporting local farms, local food production and local businesses in addition to fair trade policies and structures and systems that embody the valued of reducing pollution, increasing health, treating workers honorably and animals humanely.

An ethical food vision holds that each of us must make a conscious effort to transform from consumer to the noble human being as steward and servant of God most Exalted. In the end, no matter what faith or creed one holds, it is an awesome thing that the earth yields to us an abundant diversity of delicious and nutritious foods. Cultivation of gratitude and respect is part of our common vision.

Good Practices in Congregations

Arlin Wasserman

Congregations can help support better food and agriculture practices through the choices we make about the food we purchase for congregational activities from coffee hours and potlucks to food banks and schools. We can also make a difference by choosing where we buy our food and where we focus our charitable efforts. Here is survey of some good practices that congregations are using:

Purchasing Food

Congregations can purchase foods that are produced in ways that are better for the environment, help improve life for agricultural workers, treat animals humanely, and support ones local economy. Food producers let consumers know about their farming and business practices through certifications and labels such as “organic” and “cage free.” The Sacred Foods Project offers a guide to certification and labeling claims available at [WEBSITE]. From individuals buying food for a social hour to managers choosing what to buy for your congregation’s school, here are a few ways to make your food choices count:

Buy Organic food. Food that carries an organic certification symbol has been grown and processed without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Purchasing organic food reduces that amount these chemicals applied to farmland and released into the environment.

Buy Fair Trade™ certified foods. Fair Trade™ certification is applied to foods ranging from coffee and tea to rice and bananas. Under this program, farmers received a fair price, fair labor standards are ensured, and a share of the sale goes to support community development programs in the area where your food was produced. Equal Exchange, a company specializing in Fair Trade™ coffee offers a simple purchasing program for congregations at <http://www.equalexchange.com/interfaith-program>.

Buy humanely raised dairy, eggs, meat and poultry. The Certified Humane Raised & Handled symbol is placed on animal products produced according to the standards established by Humane Farm Animal Care Act?. The standards ensure that animals are allowed to engage in their natural behavior, are handled in ways that limit stress, and receive a healthy diet. Farmers also indicate how they raise and handle their animals using terms such as “cage free” or “free range.” To learn more about labeling claims visit [WEBSITE].

Buy Shade Grown or Songbird Friendly Coffee. Many congregations buy coffee, the world’s most valuable agricultural crop, and coffee growing has spread to many regions around the world. Often, native forests are cleared to make way for coffee plantations, eliminating the canopy of trees songbirds use as resting places during their migration. Shade Grown and Songbird Friendly coffees are grown using methods that either allow part of the original forest to

remain or include new plantings of trees that will grow to produce a new canopy.

Buy food grown by farmers in your community. Buying from nearby farmers keeps your dollars circulating in the community longer and helps to support farmers working in your community. It also reduces the environmental footprint of the food by reducing the amount of oil needed for transport and the amount of packaging needed to protect food in transport. Fresh foods are easiest to find, including fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, meat and poultry. You can often find food that is grown in your community either at a farmers market or in your grocery store. If that's not available, look in the supermarket for food grown in your home state or a neighboring state.

Build a relationship with the people who grow and make your food:

Congregations can build relationships with the farmers in your communities, learning more about one another and finding new ways to help each other. You can talk to farmers at your local farmers market or find producers in your area through on line directories such as LocalHarvest.org. Your congregation can choose to host a farmers market, inviting farmers to set up shop in your parking lot, social hall or recreation room following large event. You can also work within your congregation to set up a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, where some households pay a farmer at the start of the growing season for a share of his or her harvest through the year. This provides farmers with the money they need to start the season and households with fresh produce for many months. You find an existing CSA near you through LocalHarvest.org. Some congregations also choose to buy food from local farmers to use in their meals programs or food pantries, either at the end of the market day or through a CSA program.

Congregations also can build relationships with people who make food in your community buy working with local restaurants and caterers to provide food for congregational functions. At the end of the day, they may have leftover food available for donation to your congregation's meals program or food pantry. (Restaurants making these donations must comply with local, state and federal health and safety laws. A food donation guide for restaurants prepared by the National Restaurant Association and the United States Department of Agriculture is available [here](#).)

Case Studies

- Forty churches in Iowa and Wisconsin held Harvest of Hope Farmers Markets between November 2006 and March 2007 under a program started in the Madison, Wisconsin Christian community. The winter farmers' market featured handmade and farmer-owned products from local and regional farmers and small farm cooperatives. The markets help farm families increase their incomes at the same time that they provide a safety net for other farmers. Ten percent of the proceeds go into a fund to help farmers who face emergency surgery without insurance, power

cutoffs leaving livestock without water or augured feed or spring planting without enough money to purchase seed. To learn more about the program, visit: <http://www.cclpmidwest.org/harvestofhopehome.html>

- The Houston Jewish Community Center and Finca Pura Vida (Pure Life Farm) have joined together in a Community Supported Agriculture project, under a national program offered by Hazon. More than thirty households that are members of the Community Center purchase a share of the farm's seasonal harvest for a fixed price before the growing season begins, ensuring they will receive an ever-changing assortment of fresh, local and organic produce. The farm is guaranteed a stable base of customers and the money it needs for the season ahead. In addition to receiving a weekly box of fruits and vegetables, members of the Community Center also visit Finca Pura Vida to plant seeds and help in the harvest.

Connecting to Farmers Around the World

Some of the food we buy ourselves and in our congregations cannot be grown near where we live and worship. We can use our purchasing power and our donations to help support farmers working around the world, and support sustainable development in impoverished agricultural communities. Several nonprofit organizations offer us an opportunity to make connections with farmers around the world, including:

Heifer International offers a program to let individuals and congregations purchase livestock, tools and technical assistance programs that they will deliver to increase the self-reliance of farming communities across the world. Their on-line catalogue of donations is [here](#).

Thanksgiving Coffee provides a direct connection between your purchase of coffee and supporting sustainable development project at coffee cooperatives in Latin America, Africa and Asia, including Mirembe Kawomera Coffee, produced by a cooperative of Christian, Jewish and Muslim farmers in Uganda. To learn more about these cooperatives and order coffee packaged for personal or institutional use, visit [here](#).

Case Studies

- The Covenant Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia has a longstanding partnership with Heifer International that connects congregants with farmers in the U.S. and abroad and increases the effectiveness of its charitable giving to support sustainable development in agricultural communities. The church's holiday gift market includes Heifer's offerings, where congregants can "buy" livestock, seeds, equipment and technical assistance for a farmer as a holiday gift for someone they know. The congregation also partners with Heifer to lead an adult mission to work with low-income farmers in Appalachia.

RESOURCES

CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread, a resource available from Earth Ministry at http://www.earthministry.org/food_faith.htm

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table

This seven-session curriculum for congregational discussion groups, written by Jennifer Halteman, explores the links between the way we eat and the way we live. Skillfully weaving scripture, prayer, and stories from our local and global community, the curriculum explores four key aspects of our relationship with food: the health of our bodies; the challenge of hunger; the health of the earth that provides our food; and the ways we use food to extend hospitality and enrich relationships.

www.pcusa.org/hunger/food

Rethinking School Lunch (RSL)

The RSL program uses a systems approach to address the crisis in childhood obesity, provide nutrition education, and teach ecological knowledge.

www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/rsl.html

Youth Based Curriculum and Programs developed by the Food Project

Includes French “Fries and the Food System: A Year Round Curriculum Connecting Youth with Farming and Food” and a manual series on the principles, structures, and philosophies vital to the success of any youth-based program.

www.thefoodproject.org/buy/internal1.asp?ID=144

Teaching Organic Farming & Gardening: Resources for Instructors

Published in 2003 by the UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, this 600-page manual covers practical aspects of organic farming and gardening, applied soil science, and social and environmental issues in agriculture. Units contain lecture outlines for instructors and detailed lecture outlines for students, field and laboratory demonstrations, assessment questions, and annotated resource lists.

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/education/instruction/tofg/index.html>

Teaching Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability: Resources for Instructors

Published in 2005, these resources are organized into six units, three focusing on marketing and three covering other topics related to making a small farm economically viable. Included are lessons and resources for running a community supported agriculture (CSA) project, selling at farmers’ markets, forming collaborative marketing groups and grower cooperatives, and selling to restaurants. Also covered are strategies to improve small farm planning, including enterprise visioning and market assessment; creating a business plan, including marketing and crop plans; and managing cash flow.

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/education/instruction/tdm/index.html>

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith At the Table: Readings for Reflection and Action, a curriculum developed by Advocate Health Care, Church World Service and the Presbyterian Hunger Program and available at <http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/features/justeating.htm>

Resources on Industrial Agriculture and Humane Sustainable Food Systems

The following online and published resources may be helpful for designing food related curricula and for establishing sustainable food practices within educational institutions and religious organization.

WEBSITES

International:

- Compassion in World Farming (www.ciwf.org.uk/index.shtml)
- Environmental Health Perspective (www.ehponline.org/topic/agriculture.html)
- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (www.fao.org/)
- Food First: Institute for Food and Development Policy (www.foodfirst.org/)
- Future Harvest (www.futureharvest.org/)
- International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (www.ifpri.org)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (www.ifad.org/)
- World Health Organization (www.who.int/en/)
- World Resources Institute (www.wri.org/)
- World Society for the Protection of Animals (www.wspa-international.org/)
- Worldwatch Institute (www.worldwatch.org)

US Focused:

- Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>)
- Center for Food Safety (www.centerforfoodsafety.org/)
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers (www.caff.org/)
- Community Food Security Coalition (www.foodsecurity.org/)
- Ecological Farming Association (www.eco-farm.org/)
- Factory Farming (www.factoryfarming.org)
- Food Security Learning Center (www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/)
- The Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org/farm/)
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org/)
- Keep Antibiotics Working Campaign (www.keepantibioticsworking.com)
- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.sustainableagriculture.net/)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (<http://attra.ncat.org/>)
- The New Farm (www.newfarm.org)
- Organic Consumers Association (www.organicconsumers.org/)
- Pesticide Action Network of North America (www.panna.org/)
- Public Citizen (www.citizen.org/cmep/foodsafety/)
- Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org)
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (www.sare.org)
- Sustainable Table (www.sustainabletable.org)

- Union of Concerned Scientists (www.ucsusa.org/food_and_environment/)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov)

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FAITH AND FOOD PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRAMS, AND CAMPAIGNS

Campaign for Fair Food

The Campaign for Fair Food is an ongoing effort of the Presbyterian Church (USA), in partnership with farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee

Workers (CIW), to establish purchasing practices within the retail food industry that advance fair wages and other human rights of tomato pickers who labor at the base of corporate supply chains.

www.pcusa.org/fairfood

Faith in Place: Stronger Congregations for a Sustainable World

Faith in Place is a non-profit organization that gives religious people the tools to become good stewards of the earth. They partner with religious congregations to promote clean energy and sustainable farming.

www.faithinplace.org

Faithful Harvest Campaign

An Eco-Justice program of the National Council of Churches of Christ, Faithful Harvest is a grass roots movement to transform the U.S. food system, via policy, organizing, mission, advocacy, and worship, into a food system that rights the injustices of current practices.

www.nccecojustice.org

Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership

A project of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns, the Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership strives to empower faith communities, farmers and neighborhoods to build rural-urban alliances and create innovative partnerships for just and sustainable food systems.

www.emoregon.org

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC)

NCRLC is a membership organization with a strong focus on agriculture and food issues. Initiatives include: Agribusiness Accountability Initiative, an open forum on the impact of agribusiness conglomerates on farmers and ranchers, rural landscapes and food security; Global Partners in Rural Life Development, a global network of organizations and training centers devoted to sustainable agriculture, livelihoods, and the environment; and Sustainable Communities on the Land, which provides resources for rural communities seeking sustainability and a database of religious communities on the land.

www.ncrlc.com

Sacred Foods Project

The Sacred Foods Project is an interfaith effort to promote greater understanding about how to grow, process and market food according to religions teachings and ethics.

www.sacred-foods.org

HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Portland State University – making food services humane and sustainable through a new contract with food service giant, Sodexo. For more information on PSU's food contract, see www.pdx.edu/sustainability/cs_downloads.html (contract documents) and www.psudining.com/community.html (Sodexo programs at PSU).

University of California Santa Cruz – strategic partnerships for advancing education, research, and institutional change toward creating sustainable food systems. See information on campus based initiatives and statewide developments at: <http://socialsciences.ucsc.edu/casfs/farm2college/index.html>

University of New Hampshire Food & Society Initiative – actively engaging the University community in local and sustainable agriculture and nutrition projects, such as a New Hampshire farm to school program, an organic dairy farm, and a commitment to cage-free eggs.
www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/fas/

Community Food Security Coalition Farm to College Programs – a main resource and spring board for existing farm to college programs nationwide.
www.farmtocollege.org/

CERTIFICATION INFORMATION

- Humane – www.certifiedhumane.com
- Organic – www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm; www.ccof.org
- Fair Trade – www.transfairusa.org; www.fairtrade.net
- Local Sourcing – www.foodroutes.org
- Other/Third Party Certification
 - Food Alliance – www.foodalliance.org