

Eco-Food Group

Reports and notes from the Open Circle Eco-Food Group

Annual Report of the Open Circle Eco-Food Committee
March, 2006-March, 2007

The mission of the Open Circle Eco-Food Committee is to raise awareness of the impact of personal food choices on the planet and its species, and to engage in advocacy efforts supportive of food-related environmental and social justice.

The Eco-Food committee has been meeting every month to six weeks on Saturday morning for a little over a year. Knowing we would have to educate ourselves before we could engage in advocacy efforts and educate others on food-related environmental and social justice issues, we began to read and discuss *Fast Food Nation*, by Eric Schlosser, and later, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, while we developed our mission statement, goals, and annual plan. Both books proved invaluable as primers on the most relevant eco-food topics.

A visit to Grassway Organics, a local organic farm with a retail food store on the farm, provided a working model for the tenets of sustainable agriculture outlined by Michael Pollan. Our gracious hosts, farmers Wayne and Kay Craig, gave us a two hour tour of the pig barn, the milking parlor, the chicken and cow pasture (riding atop hay bales in the back of Wayne's truck), and the store, and offered many insights into their commitment to organics and their daily and seasonal operations.

Food labeling was studied and a survey undertaken of organic food products offered at local and area grocery stores. To better understand fair trade, we viewed and discussed a video on fair trade coffee and tea produced by UW-Milwaukee and Alterra Coffee. This video is currently circulating within the larger community and will eventually be donated to the Open Circle library.

Linda Struye, owner of The Little Farmer apple orchard, explained Integrated Pest Management, which, while not organic, takes into consideration farm workers, consumers, and ecological concerns such as leaching, toxicity to bees, and plant and soil residue half-life.

We discovered that every five years a new Farm Bill is enacted and that the latest version will be voted on this year. Members began to realize the importance of this sweeping piece of legislation with major consequences for all Americans and internationally as well, and decided to become acquainted with the various titles of the bill through internet research.

But it wasn't all study. In October we hosted an all-fellowship Harvest Celebration dinner, with an emphasis on organically and locally grown food and family traditions. A collection was taken and \$85 donated to the Fond du Lac Loaves and Fishes program. In November we coordinated and led a Sunday service for the fellowship, celebrating the Universe Story.

We were able to realize our goal of a newspaper article on eco-food topics when the Reporter interviewed committee members and published a front page article, along with a photo of a local farmer. An additional, brief article was featured in the Action Advertiser.

We continue to gain enthusiastic committee members, so it's apparent that interest in these topics and a realization of their importance is growing within our faith community. Or maybe it's just that the word is out about where to go for a good cup of (fair trade) coffee on Saturday morning.

Submitted by Karen Lindberg-Schuppe, 2006-2007 Chair
April 24, 2007