

## **Standing Up for Family Farms and Our Own Good Health**

By: Judy Wicks, Summer 2007

What a glorious time of year when farmers first arrive at our back door with fresh cut asparagus and rhubarb, marking the beginning of the local harvest season. This spring, my daughter Grace started working three days a week at Green Meadow Farm, a principle supplier of fresh produce to the White Dog. Located in Lancaster County, Green Meadow is only a few miles from where our French Huguenot ancestors first farmed in 1712 on land they purchased from William Penn. Finally, a family member has returned to the land! Grace is delighted to report that she has just picked the first strawberries of the season. I can't wait till they arrive at the White Dog to see what delectable desserts Pastry Chef Jen Weckerle will offer. I'm so looking forward to the summer, as each of the delicious fruits and vegetables come into season, culminating with our harvest celebration, the Dance of the Ripe Tomatoes in September, with a band that plays music I love to dance to!

For people who care about good food, this particular summer is important for another reason - the US Farm Bill is up for discussion, and it sure does need a major overhaul. Since its inception during the Depression, the Farm Bill has moved from lending needed support to family farmers to policies that are putting small farmers right out of business by subsidizing the mono-crop commodities of corporate agribusiness. In so many ways, the Farm Bill has had devastating consequences we may not realize. Take the cow: Cows are herbivores - nature designed them to eat grass. So does it make any sense to move cows off pasture and confine them in animal factories or feed lots where they are fed an unnatural diet of corn that actually makes them sick? Surely it costs more to grow, process and transport corn than to simply let cows graze outside on pasture where they are happy and healthier. Not under the current Farm Bill, which provides billions in subsidies to corporate corn producers to artificially lower the price. While the Farm Bill makes corn cheaper for the animal factories, there are health costs to consumers and environmental costs due to industrial farm practices that deplete and pollute our soil and water. Grass-fed cows produce meat and milk with essential nutrients lacking in corn-fed cows, which on the other hand produce products high in unhealthy saturated fat. Because of close confinement, animals raised in factories – cows, pigs and chickens – are fed antibiotics. Eventually ingested by consumers, the drugs become ineffective when needed to combat human infections. All in all, grass-fed is healthier for animals, humans and nature, which is why all the beef, pork, chicken, eggs and most dairy products we serve at the White Dog come from animals raised on pasture. Yet the Farm Bill works against this healthy and humane system of animal husbandry.

You may be surprised to know that another troublesome consequence of the Farm Bill is the increase in immigration from Mexico to the US. Because of government subsidies, corn grown on big industrial farms in the US, using chemical and petrochemical pesticides and fertilizers, can be sold below cost in Mexico where it is cheaper than corn grown organically by Mexican farmers. Due to the US Farm Bill, these once self-reliant farmers have been forced off their land, and turned into immigrants desperate for low-

paying jobs in the US to survive. Ever wonder why the US has developed an epidemic of obesity and diabetes? Again, you can turn to the Farm Bill, which not only encourages production of fatty corn-fed meat, but also subsidizes the high fructose corn syrup used as a sweetener in sodas and other junk food. As Barbara Kingsolver points out in her wonderful new book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, the US government urges us to eat more fruits and vegetables, but rather than providing support to the farmers who grow these products, they do just the opposite – giving subsidies that make junk food more affordable than fruits and vegetables, thereby assuring that school lunches and fast food are dominated by fats and sugars of processed foods. Had enough? Its time to act!

The Farm Bill has something in it to harm just about every one you know. Two White Dog events this summer combine an entertaining evening with information to help our customers take action on the 2007 Farm Bill. In July, Grace will host a screening of “King Corn,” and in August, Chef Andy Brown will offer up a Local Corn Dinner. Both feature speakers who will inspire us to action. While you’re here, check out the Black Cat book section for titles such as Michael Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Jo Robinson’s *Pasture Perfect*, Peter Singer’s *Why Our Food Choices Matter*, and Gene Logsdon’s *All Flesh is Grass*. We are growing a fine collection of books on sustainable agriculture, alternative energy and local living economies, which we’re offering at a special discount to newsletter subscribers.

What could be more important than the food we put into our mouths and the mouths of our children every day? Lets make sure the 2007 US Farm Bill supports a food system we can trust – one that provides safe, healthy, nutritious foods, supports family farmers here and abroad, treats farm animals with respect and care, and protects our natural environment.

Wishing you a delicious summer of juicy peaches and ripe tomatoes,

Judy Wicks