

# Massachusetts conference celebrates organic farming

Each summer for 20 years now, the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) has been holding its Summer Conference in Amherst, Massachusetts. NOFA is a non-profit organization of organic farmers and gardeners, as well as farmers who are interested in converting from conventional to sustainable methods, and consumers interested in supporting the development of organic farming in the northeastern United States.

Although organic growing was at the head of the conference this year, it was by no means limited (in attendance or in interest) to NOFA members, or to those who are working organic farmers.

The conference was subtitled a *Celebration of Rural Life*, and this comprehensive, celebratory nature was most evident in the numerous workshops that were presented. The 100 workshops explored nearly every aspect of self-reliant living, with presentations about farm management and economics; animals (from cows and rabbits to oxen and llamas); herbs and flowers; homestead skills and crafts (such as wool dyeing from natural materials, handspinning, broommaking, and preserving the harvest); technology and alternative energy (including wind power, low cost homes and barns, and appropriate building techniques; composting and soil fertility; and many more.

In addition to the main conference, NOFA organized a complete Children's Conference, with an exciting range of workshops that made the adults jealous. Puppets, juggling, papermaking, candle dipping, solar dehydrators, cooperative games, farm songs, and worm boxes were among the presentations offered.

More than 30 exhibitors were on hand to share information about new books, services and products, to make some new contacts, and to sell their wares. Additional activities included a certified organic farmer's market, a coffeehouse, an organic wine-tasting party, and a late-night dance featuring the blues-rock band, After Hours.

The keynote address for the conference was given by Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Du Bois, co-founders of the Center for Living Democracy. Frances Moore Lappe is best known for her book *Diet for a Small Planet*. She has written 11 other books and has co-founded an American educational centre on world hunger. Paul Martin Du Bois has devoted his life to civil rights, community organizations and the revitalization of minority communities.

By speaking to community organizations across the United States, the pair hope to encourage people to find solutions to global problems by realizing the power of the individual. Both speakers emphasized that collaborative efforts by ordinary people are the most powerful ways of resolving conflicts, and working towards positive social

change. Their concept of "living democracy" is one based in action and grassroots involvement, rather than in decision-making by distant politicians: "Democracy is not what we have. It's what we do."

The date has already been set for next year's conference. Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts will again host the event from August 11 to 13, 1995.

To find out more about NOFA, or to subscribe to their quarterly newspaper, *The Natural Farmer* (\$10 US for 4 issues, \$14 US in Canada), contact; NOFA, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005, USA.

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