

## HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, 2013 In Review

### *Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,*

*We find ourselves in unexplored territory as our circumstances undergo a drastic change. Yet the end result, dimly outlined on the horizon, resembles original intentions more than ever before. In response to many heartfelt expressions of sympathy for our late 2011 fire, I say HFG not only has rebuilt, we've living out a Cinderella story. I credit the contributions of others, the dialog, and the slow accumulation of learning what not to do, as well as what works – in other words, life experience – for the accomplishment of this miracle. This past year has seen significant movement toward our collective goals. While our farm has been sidelined for the time being, I think you'll agree after reading this news that events reveal a flowering of seeds we've planted these many years.*



*Eleutherococcus senticosus* (Rupr. ex Maxim.) Maxim.  
Siberian “ginseng” flowering for the first time at HFG.  
This transplant from the Field is happier at the House site.

### **\*\*\*\* Grower Workshops Are 2013 Winter's Harvest \*\*\*\***

Two Chinese herb grower training workshops were presented early last year, in Chicago and in northwest Washington state.

Due to difficulties in securing funding since 2008, we chose to redirect our efforts toward “boot-strapping” the ecological production of the herbs as a long-term strategy to secure access and maintain quality. In effect, we use LAc-controlled organizations to mobilize local support for grower training programs, with an objective to form local task forces comprised of both growers and practitioners.

The advantages of this strategy became apparent after the prototype grower training workshop sponsored by New Mexico State University in 2009-10, for which Peg Schafer and I designed the curriculum and delivered the bulk of the presentations. A small grower-practitioner task force formed spontaneously after that series of workshops. While this small group became inactive after a few years, the basic market dynamic was apparent: LAc/DOM leadership gave farmers the confidence to invest in planting perennial crops for which production and economic data are unavailable.

In addition, another level of leadership from the A&OM profession has worked in our favor. From 2005 to 2011, HFG ran a week-long August intensive training for A&OM students and graduates which functioned as a kind of “boot camp” for understanding where Chinese medicinal herbs come from, what happens to them in the process, and how we have choices to either mishandle them or use them wisely. We awarded about fifty certificates of completion for that August program over the years, and several of those students have gone on to build the organizational structures needed to initiate and lead domestic production of the herbs.

Outstanding achievers include Jason Redinbo (class of 2005) who founded the Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine in Pilot, Virginia, and Amanda Kreiss (class of 2009) who founded Inner Ecology, Inc. in Chicago.

Both of these organizations are now leading local task forces of herb growers.

In addition, Mercy Yule, who served as an officer of High Falls Foundation for several years, is now leading the Northwest Asian Medicinal Herb Network formed as an outcome of the March 2013 workshop. That program was sponsored by the Northwest Agriculture Business Center, an agricultural economic development agency located in Mt. Vernon, WA. Part of the agency's mission is to re-purpose farmers disadvantaged by the decline of the flower-growing industry in that part of the state.



NABC workshop, March 2013, Mt. Vernon WA

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In response to a similar need, Peg Schafer is working with a group in western Nevada seeking to diversify growers of alfalfa, a water-use intensive crop. Areas of the country where farmers have run into ecological or economic challenges seem more open to the possibility of considering less well-known alternative crops such as Chinese medicinal herbs.

The Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine has formed the Appalachian Medicinal Herb Growers Consortium and is appealing to local authorities for funding set aside to redirect tobacco growers. The Blue Ridge Center's extensive garden is now more than six years old and provides abundant produce for their clinic, as well as an ideal setting for grower training.

A pattern may be discerned in these recent developments. Informed, activist LACs and their business entities are connecting with local growers, often via the agencies concerned with local resiliency. The "localism" movement has been successful enough in recent years that more effort and money are going toward building local capacities to feed ourselves, restore the landscape, prepare for climate change, and create systems for local self-sufficiency.

This is an ideal situation in which to introduce the concept of local production of Chinese herbal medicine as a means to enhance physical and economic health. Because LACs are given sufficient scope of practice in many states to verify (and thus control) herbal quality, so long as production proceeds in a transparent, scientific manner we will be able to assure our patients that their herbs are safe and sound.



HFG 2013 intern Erica Georgaklis designed and built this path behind the garden shed, with black locust logs serving as steps and borders.

\*\*\*\* *Friends in China 1* \*\*\*\*

Wenhong (Peter) Xie is a University of Massachusetts Amherst grad who participated in our student garden and seed germination activities; his English is top-notch and he helped me with translations for my presentation in Hunan in 2009. Now he's a campaigner with Greenpeace East Asia stationed in Beijing. We stayed in touch and I asked him to monitor the Chinese media on subjects of interest to HFG.

Peter sent me an amazing report last May, "List of China's state/provincial officials calling for Chinese herbal medicine to help prevent bird flu or other pandemics." This includes a detailed list of a dozen government officials who issued statements during the month of April 2013. I consider Peter's report as solid evidence that people in China are rethinking public health strategies after their experience with the SARS epidemic in 2002. As documented by the World Health Organization, traditional Chinese herbal medicine was instrumental in resolving that outbreak (see <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Js6170e/>).

What implications for public health in our local communities are suggested by such a policy shift? Do our efforts to develop local sources of Chinese herbal medicine take on a new urgency? In Vermont people started talking about "post peak-oil medicine" several years ago; discussions in other communities are inevitable. As western medicine has no "cure" for contagious viral disease and climate change is exacerbating the conditions for the emergence of viruses (not to speak of the problems of confined animal feeding operations or hospital-borne contagion), Chinese herbal medicine gains credibility as a treatment option.

Last summer, Greenpeace East Asia came out with their report on pesticides in Chinese herbs, which provoked justified concern. Because Peter was right there in the office, I was able to email him a prompt response to the report which then was received favorably by his colleagues. The text follows:

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Jun 26, 2013

**To Greenpeace East Asia:**

I applaud your recent report, "Chinese Herbs: Elixir of Health or Pesticide Cocktail?" and understand the need to send a message to the government of China. However, I am concerned about the way the report will be used in North America, as there may be unintended negative effects for Chinese herbal medicine in the West and upon our efforts to produce the herbs ecologically on this continent.

*1. Support herbal practitioners*

We need to support our licensed practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine, who must depend on imported herbs for many years to come while we develop our domestic industry. They are our primary market; the growers of Chinese herbs in North America sell direct to practitioners. To cast doubt on the quality of imported herbs discourages the use of Chinese herbal medicine in its basic form.

The Greenpeace report sampled herbs from Tongrentang, Yunnan Bai Yao and other Chinese companies. However, the licensed profession of Chinese herbal medicine in the USA recognizes dependable companies, for example Spring Wind, which sell only to the profession. Spring Wind is owned by Andrew Ellis who has sourced herbs in China for over thirty years and tests his herbs for the presence of pesticides. Today people are collecting husks of the cicada bloom occurring here in the Hudson Valley, because they want to use it for Chan Tui. Spring Wind tested Chinese-sourced Chan Tui, found it heavily contaminated with pesticides, and announced they would discontinue the product. Herbal practitioners are confident in Spring Wind and other trusted companies, and can provide reassurance to their patients while we grow the herbs domestically and ecologically.

*2. Avoid propaganda*

As of July 2012, the U.S. National Institute of Health's [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov) database listed 228 new drug studies based on Chinese herbal medicine. Pharmaceutical multinationals are funding the research, intending to produce and manufacture the drugs in China and get them approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. I have been advised by marketing specialists experienced with the pharmaceutical industry that an obvious media strategy would be to cast doubt on authentic herbal formulas as "dirty" or contaminated while the approved drugs would be "pure." The recent Greenpeace report would seem to feed into that perception. Let's avoid being used as a tool by pharmaceutical industry propagandists.

In fact, the problem is not China and its policies but industrial agriculture throughout the world. American ginseng -- in fact, all conventionally cultivated ginseng -- is laden with pesticides because monocropping inevitably invites pathogens. Most North American herbal practitioners do not recognize this fact, and continue to buy conventional ginseng produced in America while remaining ignorant of efforts to grow ginseng ecologically. The problem of pesticide use is one that we must counteract by working together. To encourage governments, NGOs and private funders to support and promote ecological agriculture for both food and herbs is a positive strategy and perhaps our best hope.

Thank you for your good work.

Jean Giblette

**\*\*\*\* Friends in China 2 \*\*\*\***

Western observers in China are like the blind men touching the elephant. Every observation is based on who and what you know. If we were to believe only the New York Times, for example their series this past summer on "Leaving the Land" which detailed the agonies of Chinese farmers being relocated to the cities, we could worry that China is headed for big trouble. And believe that more industrialization is inevitable -- which is the point of such propaganda.

Our experience contrasts with that view. China is a highly pluralistic society and, much like the United States, enjoys a huge amount of activity at the grass roots level that never gets reported in mainstream media outlets. When this past April I presented my paper "Ecological Agriculture and Chinese Herbal Medicine in the U.S." to over 100 Chinese and 40 western scholars involved in rural development, my recognition of small-scale ecological settings as ideal for the production of Chinese herbs was greeted with great enthusiasm; subsequent to that I received three separate invitations to visit China and present my ideas.



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Seventh International Forum on Ecological Civilization: Rural Development, sponsored by the Institute for Postmodern Development of China and eight co-sponsors including Renmin University of China and Yale University, April 26-27, 2013, Claremont CA.

Our host for that meeting, Wang Zhihe, made sure we (Chris Reed and I) enjoyed quality time with their honoree, Wen Tiejun, leader of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement, and also with Liao Ziaoyi (Sheri Liao) of the Global Village of Beijing. U.S. eco-agriculture leaders Fred Kirschenmann and John Ikerd also presented at that conference, which was fully interpreted with conference proceedings published in both languages. All these people are environmentalists, many of the

Chinese deeply concerned with the negative impacts of industrialization upon their society, including rupture of family life of the kind portrayed in Lixin Fan's 2009 documentary film, "Last Train Home."

In listening to them for many hours, I was struck by how much the Chinese experience resembles ours, in that throughout our history (so short relative to theirs) agrarian philosophy, hopes and dreams run like a counter-current to a dominant system of resource extraction. More and more people are waking up to the reality that extractive economics cannot be sustained and, in fact, are killing us along with countless other species.

The 100+ Chinese scholars stayed a week in the Los Angeles area and then went on to New Haven, CT to spend another week at Yale University. Travel expenses were paid by the Chinese government. Dr. Wang, head of the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China and connected to a worldwide network of scholars who advocate for "ecological civilization," had his book *Second Enlightenment* published by the Beijing University Press last year. (See his paper at: [http://www.highfallsgardens.net/newsletters/Second\\_Enlightenment.pdf](http://www.highfallsgardens.net/newsletters/Second_Enlightenment.pdf).) Judging by the increasing success of Dr. Wang's conferences, one finds reason to hope that the environmentalists are gaining influence within the Beijing government.

What these developments may mean for Chinese herbal medicine is that, by treating herbs as agricultural products (their status throughout history) rather than industrial products, herb production can leverage economic recovery in small localities, whether in China or the U.S. This hope is upheld in many rural villages. We have only 2.5 million farmers in the U.S., having suffered our own form of the clearances, while there are 250 million in China. However, we have many more millions of exurban land owners, retired baby boomers, inheritors of idle farms and others who can participate by planting a few trees of *Cornus officinalis* (source of shān zhū yú), to cite one example, and selling into an LAc-run cooperative that adds value by protecting product quality.

High Falls Gardens is only one hectare in size. Many Chinese small holdings are smaller than that. Yet through local cooperation, and by honoring appropriate, informed herbal usage by licensed practitioners, we can create business entities that protect us from loss of access and control over herb quality.

This promise for the future is possible only if Chinese herbal medicine professionals, patients and allies recognize what is taking place at the grass roots level and act on their hopes rather than their despair. Unanimity is helpful but not required; a critical mass of activists will do the job. ☒