

The Seed Is Planted

by Jean Giblette

One of those small, quiet moments came about in November 2007 – like the dislodged pebble, the fluttering wings of a butterfly, the disturbance that foretells big changes. Twenty years of work preceded our announcement, and yet it was only the beginning.

Our national network of medicinal plant growers announced a new website, LocalHerbs.org, at Pacific Symposium. Domestic and ecologically grown Chinese herbs are being sold directly to licensed practitioners of Oriental Medicine via this dedicated site. This is the birth of one possible future, one in which local herbs grown to the highest standards supply our health care needs, support the profession of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, and provide incomes for our farms and gardens.

We invited everyone attending the Symposium to visit a ground-floor suite dubbed the "herb room," where we passed out beautiful, fragrant samples. Several PCOM Chicago students hung out in the herb room and persuaded me to include Chicago in the Botanical Studies for Oriental Medicine program. (Fifteen sites around the country had been chosen in 2005 to receive attention, plus small stipends to upgrade their Chinese medicinal herb gardens.) The following April, green but landless PCOM Chicago opted for a finely crafted grow-light cabinet set up in the common room, and we ran a germination workshop.

Twenty years ago, a student with great heart Qi provided the original impulse for hands-on plant work. Today's students, as a group, won't settle for the complete separation of clinical studies and plant work as maintained in contemporary China. The American system of education in Oriental Medicine is changing to accommodate them. Our student gardeners are among the people pushing for domestic cultivation of herbs. They will move the science forward in the coming decades, to create an expanded materia medica that incorporates local substitutes including American plant species.

I often wonder about the world these stu-

dents will inherit when they are the teachers and senior practitioners 25 years from now. Perhaps they will no longer think of their herbal practice as Chinese or East Asian. More likely, they will be using modified formulas, combinations of Asian, European and American plant species. And it is my most fervent hope that these plants will be local and wild-cultivated with the highest ecological standards, in remediated, restored and highly biodiverse settings. Medicinal plants are an important element in a return to the abundant food forests, savannas, swamps and grasslands



once tended here on Turtle Island. Even in Illinois.

As a native Midwesterner, born and reared in central Minnesota, I try to imagine the prairies and the Great Plains restored. Perhaps all the grass species and buffalo herds can't come back, but surely we can rebuild biodiversity and ecological balance, transforming those endless fields of corn into healthier, far more varied food and medicine – and a more vibrant economy.

We are obliged to be vigilant as citizens, but now in response to unprecedented threats it's also important to imagine the world we want to live in. As an exercise, think of a renewed New World, including a biodiverse, intensively and ecologically farmed Illinois ripe with specialty crops.

It's early morning in September, 2034, and the clear sky promises a typically busy late summer day at the Central Illinois Herb Cooperative. The truck has just left for a round of pickups from

member farms. The Co-op's vehicle, powered by hemp oil from the local pyrolysis facility, was refueled yesterday. The fuel was purchased with credits through the local credit clearing exchange, of which the Co-op is a key component.

Scheduled first for pickup are 48 pounds of Dan Zhu Ye plus 64 pounds of Jing Jie, both dried and loosely bundled, from farmer Nelson who owns a mobile solar dryer that was towed out to the harvest field and back by one of his mules. Next, farmer Fernandez will have 130 pounds of cut, dried and packed Bai Shao ready to go. The Fernandez farm maintains a processing facility for their lacto-fermented vegetables, six tree products including Huang Bai, and several other herbs sold through the Co-op including Shan Yao, Long Dan Cao and Gan Cao.

Then, 320 pounds of fresh Astragalus root is available from farmer Lee. The roots will have been washed in the Lees' windmill-powered root washer hooked up to their special greenhouse that recycles grey and ground water through a series of tanks planted with carefully selected live aquatic plants. The fresh roots will be cut and processed into Huang Qi at the Co-op by seasonal labor including a contingent of students from Chicago who are attending a week-long practicum.

*The Co-op is expecting a delivery of 185 pounds of freshly harvested Shan Yu Rou from their member Ms. Park, a retired homeowner on the outskirts of town who tends 15 *Cornus officinalis* trees in her half-acre orchard. Two of the students helped her pick fruit yesterday, and they will accompany her on the delivery. These trees, like the other perennial plantings at member farms and gardens, have been verified and certified by the Cooperative. Ms. Park has received conservation payments – in the form of a small number of credits from the local exchange – each year since she planted the trees. At any time, Ms. Park can call on the services of an experienced*

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agroforester under contract to the Co-op, as part of her planting and harvest agreement. The credits for the fruit now form a significant part of her retirement income.

Staff at the Co-op will direct the processing and storage of all produce delivered today. Herbs are distributed to affiliated physicians who compound formulas at their clinics, and also to local herb dispensaries. Patients have several options for taking herbs, including boiling custom formulas at home or receiving pre-boiled packs from the dispensary. Granulars are also used but are shipped from a regional processing facility in Elgin. The Co-op supplies certain herbs to the Elgin processor, and also trades surplus herbs with other bioregions that can meet standards of value and quality.

Production of medicinal herbs here in

America - in the quantities and quality level we need - requires some big changes. These are the basics: (1) Stop polluting, whether chemical agriculture, industrial byproducts, genetic engineering, or confined animal feeding operations; (2) Move from a commodity-based to a specialty crop agriculture; (3) Restore the levels of biodiversity in the soils and the landscape, with all kinds of plants (not only natives) chosen for resilience to climate change, suitability to the microniche, and future income; (4) Grow many, many more perennial plants, shrubs and trees; (5) Figure out how to compensate people for planting perennials when the harvest may be 15 to 20 years away.

Note what connects all five points above. We must re-learn how to move with the Dao rather than trying to impose our own human limits on the rest of nature. In short, we must change our extractive economy to a restorative economy. You may think it's impossible, but this is about survival, which reality is becoming increasingly apparent. Remember this little exercise in 2012 when the next Farm Bill comes round again.

Step one is for each person in the A&OM community to take responsibility for their own re-alliance with nature. Getting dirt under our fingernails is a good start, but also you need to understand agriculture and ecology at a deeper level than does your average patient, be more connected yourself so you can help others find their way.

As Charles Mann concluded in 1491: *New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, "...to think like the original inhabitants of these lands we should not set our sights on rebuilding an environment from the past but concentrate on shaping a world to live in for the future."

Food (including herbs) is our umbilical cord to Mother Earth. All aspects of food including the nasty contemporary politics are the fulcrum upon which the scientific paradigm is shifting. As a society, if only a critical mass of people can wean themselves from magic bullet thinking, and recognize medicine (herbs) as food in all its diverse, adaptive, glorious abundance, we can begin to

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recreate "the world's largest gardens." (Mann, p. 366)

Recommended Reading:

Mann, Charles C., 2006. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York NY: Vintage/Random House)

Jackson, Wes, 1996. *Becoming Native To This Place* (Washington DC: Counterpoint)

Greco, Thomas H., Jr., 2009. *The End Of Money And The Future Of Civilization* (White River Junction VT: Chelsea Green Publishing)

Hemenway, Toby, 2001. *Gaia's Garden: A Guide To Home-Scale Permaculture* (White River Junction VT: Chelsea Green Publishing)

Roberts, Wayne and Susan Brandum, 1995. *Get A Life! How To Make A Good Buck, Dance Around The Dinosaurs And Save The World While You're At It* (Toronto: Get A Life Publishing House)

Auricular Acupuncture: Treatments *continued from page 15*

Nicotine Withdrawal

This protocol is different from NADA's addiction protocol which uses: Lung 2, Shen men, Autonomic, liver and kidney (Chinese).

ACACD (Holder) uses: Shen Men, Autonomic, kidney (Chinese) Point zero, brain and limbic for addiction.

Variations include; adding to alcoholic point, tranquilizer pt and master cerebral for alcoholism. Adding adrenal gland, hypothalamus, and occipital for drug addiction. Dr. Ditsen also suggests that the patient trying to detoxify from nicotine take vitamin C (not ascorbic acid) 500mg per hour for 8 hours. Patients should eat Altoids cinnamon or peppermint while trying to quit smoking.



Save the Date!

October 4, Sunday: Asian Moon Festival
IlLaom's annual gathering & celebration. See page 16

October 11, Sunday: Practical Moxibustion Seminar
with Tom Hurrle. See page 22

October 24 & 25, Sat & Sun: Healing with Whole Foods Seminar with Paul Pitchford. See page 10

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