

Prince Charles Challenges GMO Crops

In a recent Associated Press release, Britain's Prince Charles says increased use of genetically modified crops to help solve world food shortage could lead to environmental disaster. Charles owns an organic farm, which has supplied products to stores since 1992.

He was further quoted as saying that GMO crops place impossible burdens on nature and lead to accumulating problems, which become more difficult to sort out. He believes the new experiments with modified crops could worsen problems with food supplies.

Charles further said he believed genetically modified crops could lead to unsustainable demand on irrigation systems, have detrimental effects on farmland and lead to small farmers being driven out by agricultural conglomerates. ■



Photo - Paul Morse, White House photo Prince Charles, heir apparent, equally and separately, to the thrones of sixteen sovereign states known as the Commonwealth Realms.

China to Punish Officials if Farmland Continues to Erode

In a recent China Commodities Daily report, China is drafting punitive regulations to maintain a minimum of 296 million acres of arable farmland in food production and will hold officials at various government levels accountable.

This is perhaps the first time in history the world's largest agricultural producing nation, China, is drawing the line in the sand as to what its minimum farmland requirement is and taking steps to protect it from urban and



Photo - Jialiang Gao Terraced rice fields in Yunnan Province, China.

industrial development.

In 1996, China had 321.3 million acres of arable land, which had fallen to 300 million acres of arable land by 2006. To stave off what would be certain erosion of its farmland, different arable land quotas will be allocated to various regions who must maintain the integrity of the amount of farmland they are required to protect.

"China's grain supply and demand is already in tight balance. However, demand is growing with the country's expanding population and changing dietary habits," said Liu Xiaoran, director of the Jilin Grain Economy Institute. "If the government does not take steps to ensure sufficient arable land is devoted to grains production, the country's ability to produce enough grain to feed itself is at risk."

The *China Commodities Daily* reports that even with government threats to punish officials who allow arable land to be used for purposes other than food production, the country's ability to ensure grain self-sufficiency in the mid and long term is doubtful. ■

Ethical Eating Takes Priority at Unitarian Universalist Church



Photo - East Falmouth Unitarian Universalist Church The East Falmouth, Massachusetts Unitarian Universalist Church congregation was instrumental in getting the 1,050 Unitarian Universalist congregations around the world to study and act on ethical eating.

With a long history of environmental and social justice advocacy, Unitarian Universalist churches united their effort to enter the arena of food and farming. At this year's Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in late June in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the issue of ethical eating was placed in front of representatives of almost 1,050 congregations. It was decided that for the period 2008 through 2012 that Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice would become what they call a Congregational study / action issue.

"What this means is a call for discussions to be followed by actions," said Reverend Robert Murphy of the East Falmouth, Massachusetts, UU congregation. "Ethical eating is a logical outcome of what we called 'Green Sanctuary,' a deep and long involvement by UU congregations with environmental protection and justice that has been around since the early 1990s."

Murphy was instrumental in co-authoring the Green Sanctuary guide years ago and it was his congregation that brought the issue of ethical eating in front of the entire association of UU congregations this year, which accepted the vision.

"The whole process includes talking about what everyone is

doing relative to ethical eating, what actions should be taken, more discussion and reflection. The goal is to reach a unified consensus that then leads to unified action,” Murphy said.

The UU’s Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice statement outlines possible actions that congregations and members can embark on including supporting sustainable agriculture, farmers markets and organic community gardening. Other actions include supporting community food pantries (food banks) and becoming an advocate for farmers’ cooperatives, fair-trade associations and organizations that help farmers and farm workers.

Politically active, the Unitarian Universalist Association (the international association of UU congregations) maintains a Washington, D.C., advocacy office. The office seeks to influence public policy decisions made by Congress and the administration on issues of concern to the Unitarian Universalist Association and its members. The advocacy office will help oversee the Ethical Eating initiative. ■

Web Resources



Unitarian Universalist - Falmouth: www.uuffm.org

Unitarian Universalist Association: www.uua.org

Foreign Corporate Ownership of Australian Farmland Increases

According to a report by *LexisNexis News*, six corporate farms of 15,000 acres or more have been purchased by foreign interests in the last six months in western Australia for a total investment of \$100 million.

“The main players in purchasing the farmland were grain-based global companies from England, United States of America, Asia and global agriculture companies,” said Malcom French, an agricultural real estate sales manager for Elders, a large real estate firm in Australia.

While Australia is just one of many nations targeted by foreign interests looking to own farmland, it continues with the pattern of large corporate and financial interests seeking greater control over food production on land historically owned by farmers. ■

Japan Comes to U.S. Farmers Directly for Food Security and to Circumvent Global Corporations

In a recent report by MarketWatch, Japanese trading house Marubeni Corp. recently acquired storage facilities in U.S. grain-producing regions as part of a plan to buy corn and soybeans directly from local American farmers. The acquisitions include eight grain-storage facilities and two warehouses costing

\$46.3 million.

Until now, Japan has been unable to buy large amounts of grain from U.S. farmers without going through giant grain corporations like Cargill, ADM and CHS, Inc., a situation it would like to change. Buying directly from U.S. farmers will help Japan source non-GMO grains. In addition, it will help Marubeni build networks for stable food procurement amidst global surges in grain prices.

Marubeni will purchase and store corn and soybeans and then arrange for transport directly to Japan. Marubeni expects annual shipments of 600,000 tons.

In 1960, Japan’s food self-sufficiency was 79 percent. Today it is down to 39 percent and giving cause for Japan to start establishing its own food relationships as it fears global food competition in the future from China.

The dip below 40 percent food self-sufficiency is turning into a wake-up call for Japan. Efforts to start protecting and promoting local agriculture to increase national food self-sufficiency are now being explored and implemented. ■



Photo - Japan Ministry of Agriculture
Rice paddy fields in Tanba, Japan. Japan’s rice industry is highly protected through strict import restrictions.

Small Scale Vegetable Uprising

The National Gardening Association with inputs from a Roper survey and the USDA finds that 40 percent of American households are growing vegetables and culinary herbs. With the average household of 2.6 people, that’s over 117 million households. Organic Gardening Magazine reports that for the first time in a generation, we are growing more vegetables than flowers.

Atlee-Burpee Seeds reports a doubling of its vegetables seed sales in 2008 over 2007. Similarly in London, for the first time since WWII, it is reported that vegetable seed sales have surpassed flower seed sales.

Jac Smit of The Urban Agriculture Network reports that compared to 30 years ago, a packet of seeds produces twice as much per square foot and close to that per hour of labor. The breakthroughs include hydroponic methods, drip irrigation, plastic greenhouses, improved seeds, composting, fertilizers, and insecticides. ■