

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, Spring 2016

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

The entire 2015 season felt like one of the most demanding of my career, but also the most gratifying. We're seeing the domestic production movement finally gain traction, meaning: plants in the ground. But what feels like even more progress is your amazing response to our "1,000 Practitioners" appeal. Last year we asked Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (A&OM) practitioners (otherwise known as LAc's, DOMs or TEAMs depending on their state license) to help us prove to major donors that the profession is solidly behind us. We received everything from \$5 per month via Paypal from students and recent grads, all the way up to 4-figure gifts from individuals and organizations. One organization got all 74 of its members to donate and sent one large check! With support like this, we are definitely on our way to secure the future for this medicine.

****** Farmer groups continue to grow ******

High Falls Foundation (HFF) completed the first year of its New York farmer group project funded by the NY Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI), with 32 farmers located in 23 of the 62 counties across the state. Dana Carruth, L.Ac. served as Outreach Coordinator. She, together with HFF board president Mary Anne (Mimi) Barker and Jean Giblette, conducted 22 outreach events to both the farm community and the A&OM profession, reaching over 60,000 people. (News articles reached even more, judging by the responses.) We now have over 50 farmers on a waiting list.

At this stage of development, the main obstacle is the lack of commercial quantities of verified seed and starts. Our aim is to grow 100 species of valuable plants in New York. Five of the farmers have perennial plant and nursery expertise and are working with Jean to germinate starts, to be planted in the 2016 season. Seeds of certain species, especially trees and woody plants, may take up to two years to germinate. Most people's frame of reference is vegetable gardening, involving annual plants bred to germinate and grow quickly. Most Chinese medicinal herbs, however, are close to their wild form, adapted to hibernate through the winter and disperse themselves using various germination inhibitors. Production of starts is not a trivial problem by any means.

Fortunately, the NYFVI understands that our enterprise is very long term. They awarded HFF a second year of funding, aimed at broadening the base of horticultural expertise while giving us more time to get farms planted.

Meanwhile, the Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine (BRCCM) is entering the third year of its grower program, increasing its number of farms to 50. They have 13,000 plants in the ground and are preparing over 29,000 starts this spring for the 2016 season. BRCCM has received continued funding from the Virginia Tobacco Commission (settlement funds) and, most recently, the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Groups in other states are in various stages of organization. Funding is, of course, a major obstacle to progress. The New York and Virginia groups have found funding to be absolutely necessary for administrative coordination and technical assistance to farmers. If groups do not have ready access to horticultural expertise – for example, someone who can go out to a farm and identify an unknown plant, or who can advise on what to do if vagaries of weather affect the crop – then an additional obstacle must be surmounted. Which brings us to...

****** A new horizon for Botanical Studies ******

At their November 2015 meeting in Annapolis MD, the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM) endorsed – in principle – the concept of a certificate in Chinese medicinal herb horticulture



Perilla frutescens cv Britton, with *Anemarrhena* seedlings under black plastic mulch.

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for A&OM professionals. Jean Giblette submitted a request to the CCAOM Herb Committee, chaired by Jason A. Wright, dean at Finger Lakes School of A&OM, which was accepted and then passed on to the Council.

As the farmer groups in Virginia and New York develop, the need for more widespread horticultural expertise becomes more apparent. We require a reserve of trained people who can go out to farms and answer questions in support of the farmers.

The second year of High Falls Foundation's grant from NYFVI includes funding for construction and production of a webinar series on Chinese medicinal herb horticulture, targeted to Cornell Cooperative Extension agents. Horticulture Professor Marvin Pritts will advise the project; the webinar will be designed, built and run on university facilities. After the rollout to Extension, we will be able to adapt the content to other formats. This content will provide a nucleus of material for a certificate program curriculum.

**** ***Ecological agriculture goes back to the source*** ****

Most people in the organic farming movement are familiar with the book *Farmers of Forty Centuries*. Written by USDA scientist Franklin H. King and published in 1911, the book documents his findings on how the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans were able to maintain soil fertility over thousands of years of continuous agriculture, by using ecological methods. In the USA, the book has never gone out of print and has long served as a prime inspiration for the movement.

So, how thrilling that *Farmers of Forty Centuries* was translated into Mandarin and published last year in China! We (Jean and partner Chris Reed) very much enjoy witnessing the double-take of Chinese people who find out that Americans not only want to produce Chinese herbs, they believe that the Chinese invented ecological agriculture. Many Chinese are catching on fast, and seem likely to reclaim their cultural heritage and ascendancy in this domain.

We were invited to Beijing at the end of last October, and flew in under crystal clear blue skies (noting the hundreds of acres of greenhouses or hoop-houses ringing the City) to present at the Third Forum on Rural Civilization hosted by the Chinese Academy of Governance. This was an amazing conference at which people from all over China, some in native dress, reported on special projects to revitalize local village economies. Chris was able to give an impromptu speech, remarking on how we are serving on a committee in our own rural village, for exactly the same purpose. To find such close commonality felt almost eerie.

We reconnected with friends and made new ones. Fellow presenters included Shi Yan, whom we had met in 2009 in Changsha. At that time, she had just founded the first CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) project in China, after interning on a Minnesota CSA farm. Now, she reported, there are 500 CSA farms in China. Shi Yan is one of those wonderful pioneers who are confounding their parents by using their doctorate to be a farmer. And why not? What's more important?

Also in attendance was Wen Tiejun, leader of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement and professor at Renmin University, who was on the program with Jean at Claremont College in 2013. Dr. Wen and Shi Yan were both involved in the translation of *Farmers of Forty Centuries*. We attended one of Professor Wen's evening classes at the University and met a roomful of eager young people ready to go out and start eco-farming. Just like home! ☺



Jean meets people at the Institute of Medicinal Plant Development in Beijing, accompanied by translator Xie Bangxiu, professor of English at Hubei University of Police.