

The
View
FROM

高溪園
HIGH FALLS GARDENS

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Dear Friends of High Falls Gardens,

This spring, the pull back to Earth is felt in several ways. When the bloom is off the Nasdaq it's time to take a good look around to decide what's really valuable, and the tangibles stand out. Medicinal plants are right at the top of the list, closely followed by air, water, soil and property values.

Here in the Hudson Valley there is widespread outrage over the proposed construction of at least twelve massive industrial projects along the River, including a gigantic coal-burning cement plant that a multinational corporation wants to build only twelve miles away from HFG's Hillview Farm field. Meanwhile, the New York attorney general is suing other states to the west because their coal-burning industries cause acid rain in the Adirondacks!

We of High Falls Gardens are at one with the protesters in Seattle and Washington DC, as well as those farmers in Concord, Massachusetts 225 years ago, fighting for our land and communities. It seems that suddenly the most vexing divisions among people are no longer along racial or geo-political lines, but rather in how we want to order our lives — with Mother Nature, or against Her. Our favorite protest button reads, "Green Plants, Not Cement Plants."

Honeybees Grace the Field Again

Those "Gift From Heaven" bees, the ones who flew in last summer and made their home in an empty super left over from colony number one, did not survive into this spring. Worse, we heard from beekeeper Kirk Webster of Champlain Valley Bees and Queens in Vermont that he was forced to cut everyone's orders because his

winter losses were unexpectedly devastating. "The Apistan-resistant mites finally made it to our valley," he said, referring to the pesticide used by beekeepers as a Varroa mite control. Like so many other pesticides, Apistan was useful for only the short period needed for the quickly-adaptable bugs to develop resistance.

The honeybee situation is so dire, their immune systems so challenged by intrusive management techniques and pervasive toxins in the environment, that beekeepers are searching everywhere for help. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently approved a mite-control product called Apicure, based on a food-grade formic acid made in Europe. Formic acid is a natural substance that has been used by beekeepers throughout the world in recent years, although previously not approved in the U.S. where it is a by-product of the wood industry and may contain heavy metals.

Most of the beekeepers in the HFG area have suffered winter losses and no local colonies are available for sale. We drove three hours each way to Middlebury for one large colony, as well as two small ones for a neighboring beekeeper. This new colony has a natural queen and her progeny who have over-wintered in Vermont.

Kirk Webster shares an interest in queen breeding with one of his heroes, Brother Adam, who at age 19 took over the apiary at Buckfast Abbey in southern Devon in the early 20th century about the time when tracheal mites wiped out honeybees in England. The gentle monk devoted his
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HFG FIELD DAY

Saturday,
September 16,
11am-5pm.
Call or email for
directions.



The View FROM
HIGH FALLS GARDENS

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DEAR FRIENDS

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life to honeybees, traveling all over Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor to seek out native races of bees to cross-breed with his domestic strains and improve their hardiness. Deceased for a few years now, Brother Adam lives on in his books that have captured the imaginations of a subgroup of beekeepers throughout the world.

With his Champlain Valley bees Mr. Webster practices a breeding technique called "isolated open mating," which involves moving selected colonies up into the higher altitudes of the Green Mountains for the summer and thus controlling genetic access. "Beekeeping is about to undergo a total change," he observed. "We have to question everything we do now, rethink all our practices, to come up with a combination of breeding and management that will enable the honeybee to survive."

As if by Providence, the bees' first day in their new home was full of sunshine and the field lush with plenty of rain. The supers were placed on top of a beautiful new "bee bench," a sturdy low table constructed by HFG field manager and main man Christopher Reed. So the bees were zipping around madly, checking out the *Isatis indigotica*, rhubarb species, various peony species and all the wild natives in bloom, as if to say, "Hey, gals, looks like we just moved into the Shanghai Hilton!"

Two Strikes for Wu Visit

Amid clear evidence that the new millennium has not yet arrived, the Newman team struck out for the second year in efforts to sponsor a visit to the United States from Wu Zhongfa, the manager of the largest medicinal herb garden in China, the Guangxi Botanical Garden of Medicinal Plants. The visit has been postponed once more, until the spring of 2001, and an appeal to the State Department through the U.S. Senate is in process.

Readers may recall how the Newman network began working on this visit in January of 1999, only to postpone when Mr. Wu's visa application was rejected by the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou immediately following the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

This year Mr. Wu arrived at the same consulate office early in March, fresh papers in hand, only to be rudely quizzed about his itinerary and then summarily rejected without explanation. Administrators at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the official sponsor of the visit, had trouble believing that the process was so seriously awry and decided to arm Mr. Wu with extra documents for a repeat attempt. Unfortunately he was rebuffed again and, finally, lost patience. Robert Newman, in China again since early May, was able to phone him and apologize on behalf of the U.S. hosts.

The visa application process is a sacrifice for Mr. Wu, as he has to take three days from work to travel by train the 800 kilometers from Nanning to Guangzhou and spend a lot of money each time. We learned from a friend in the Foreign Service that Guangzhou is one of the worst places in the world to do visa work. The lines are huge, fraud is rampant, the Consulate is understaffed, and the officers tend to have a cynical attitude as they are under great pressure to deal with

Champlain Valley Bees & Queens

is at 802-758-2501.

For more information

on Apicure, call 518-692-9802,

or

Betterbee, Inc. at 518-692-9669.