

The Last Newsletter from *HIGH FALLS GARDENS*, Autumn 2019

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

We started publishing a paper newsletter 25 years ago, in 1995. Then sometime in the '00s we started emailing PDFs. And now, it's a wrap! A quarter century is such a nice round number. The medium is getting old, the text too dense, and the photos too few. High Falls Gardens tries to flow with the Dao, and in the current stretch audiences are impatient with long, text-dense articles. Short pieces on a topical issue, items of interest, and a blurt when something needs to be said – that's the order of the day. We will have a blog on the new, updated website. Also, the mailing list is to be revised and all our friends will be able to confirm their interest. For this final two-page document in the old format, we present an overview of the current status of our work. Please contribute your ideas and opinions! Email Jean at hfg@capital.net.

*** Let us now praise Chinese medicinal plants! ***

High Falls Gardens started out as a flash of inspiration in Lin's Sister Herb Shop in New York City Chinatown, circa 1993. HFG now takes a back seat as Jean's sole proprietorship, with only a modest amount of plant propagation going on in her cellar and barn. HFG no longer runs field visits, events or training programs. The main action is elsewhere. In 2008 two practitioners of East Asian Medicine incorporated with Jean as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

High Falls Foundation is now advancing the cause of medicinal plant conservation, research and education with several programs. Currently, we support the **Shen Nong Society**, the first professional association in the USA devoted to East Asian herbal medicine (<https://www.shennongsociety.org>). Their fourth annual conference will be held March 21-22, 2020. We support ongoing efforts to produce Chinese medicinal herbs in North America, including coordination of the 30+ growers in the **New York Grown Chinese Medicinal Herbs** group (<https://www.facebook.com/NYGCMH/>). We are a participating organization with the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, providing **Botanical Studies** programs for their graduate students. Currently, we maintain a photo archive of Chinese medicinal plants on Instagram (#highfallsgardens) and distribute the book *Mending the Web of Life: Chinese Medicine and Species Conservation*, published in 2006 specifically for AOM/EAM clinicians in North America.



High Falls Gardens' research plot in Columbia County NY, maintained 1997-2012. All plants in the foreground, back to the line of sugar maples in the rear, are Chinese medicinal plants. We conserved germplasm (now distributed to farms), hosted field days, and taught seven sets of graduate student interns.

**** Ecological Agriculture Here and There ****

The People's Republic of China attained the robust age of 70 on October 1st. Jean and her partner Christopher Hope Reed were in Beijing two weeks before the big event, and felt the celebratory fervor in the air. On this, their third trip to China sponsored by the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China, they were honored to be part of the American entourage attached to Dr. John B. Cobb Jr., a famous proponent of Ecological Civilization. His 1989 book with economist Herman E. Daly *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* attracted the attention of thoughtful people after the Cultural Revolution who were looking for an alternative to the materialism and determinism of Western philosophy. Dr. Cobb, at age 94 and with fifty other books on philosophy and religion to his credit, enjoys the status of a sage in China -- with an ironic sense of humor, to the delight of those traveling with him.

Although the group convened in Beijing, the objectives were to inspect rural development and agricultural innovation sites in Zhejiang and Yunnan. For two weeks they toured the countryside, viewed pristine mountain vistas under clear blue skies, saw some rural poverty right next to construction sites (ubiquitous yellow cranes dotting the horizon), passed by work on the new extension of the high-speed rail network going south to Vientiane and Bangkok, ate utterly fabulous food (sometimes two banquets per day!) and held still for innumerable group photos. Special symposia at Lishui Liandu and Puer Universities, attended by hundreds of students and faculty, honored Dr. Cobb.

Jean reports: Our hosts enabled us to see how the ecological agriculture movement is coexisting with powerful industrial forces backed by multinational corporations, very similar to our situation here in North America. My presentations, showing slides of medicinal herb production sites in New York that are ecological and regenerative, were well received. The Chinese adopted industrial agriculture long ago during the so-called Green Revolution; many older farmers and gardeners insist that herbicides and pesticides are necessary. One of the local officials confessed that they are having

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We never sell or rent our list.

trouble persuading the older people to stop spraying, although the introduction of IPM (Integrated Pest Management) is partially successful. This generational mindset mirrors the North American predicament, where older farmers are trapped into a GMO seed/herbicide/pesticide regimen and don't see a way out.

President Xi endorses Ecological Civilization but strong reactionary forces argue that China's progress will be held back if the environment becomes a priority. Nevertheless, provincial officials who must deal with rural poverty are becoming aware that "Green is Gold" (one of the President's slogans). Their own domestic markets are open territory. As in the USA, the poorest cities and states are often the most receptive to new ideas. Provinces must now meet targets for environmental protection along with GDP. Rural counties below the poverty line are being supported with loans and grants in new plans for economic development, often involving creative entrepreneurship. This activity excited me: here is a great opportunity to do regenerative plantings of medicinal herbs, and the word seems to have gotten out. I am all ready to go back and find specific projects.

We toured three tea plantations: using conventional (industrial), organic, and industrial-organic practices, respectively. (For a definition of these terms see Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*.) I'm not sure our hosts planned it this way, but the evidence was apparent to the trained eye in each case. We met sympathetic agricultural entrepreneurs searching to find their market. But whether it's rice, tea, coffee, kumquats, medicinal herbs, mushrooms or soy sauce, the innovators do get support from local, provincial and federal governments in China. This provides a distinct contrast with the situation in the USA, especially since 2008, where the bulk of government funding goes to big commodity producers and the specialty crop growers are left to fend for themselves. The big take-away from our trip: Whether in China or the United States, the furry little mammals running around under the deadly feet of the dying dinosaurs have everything in common. Everyone gains if we make alliances to create Ecological Civilization.



A two-year-old planting of medicinal herbs, some of them Chinese, at a New York farm. Note the young hedgerow that separates the crops from the cow pasture. It's hot-wired now but will eventually grow up to form an impenetrable barrier that shelters birds and beneficials.

*** What about domestic production? ***

Our hopes for producing East Asian medicinal herbs in North America suffered a reality check in 2018, with the sudden bankruptcy of the Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine in southern Virginia. This small nonprofit had achieved a record level of funding for their grower program, over \$1 million since 2013. The reasons for their demise are complex. Priorities clashed or, more precisely, were not recognized by agricultural agencies accustomed to quick results from annual harvests. The emphasis was on funding jobs, facilities, equipment, while our perennial crops take many years to mature. The challenges of farm capitalization are multiplied with perennial crops, the Western system of finance being dependent on quick returns.

This experience points to a huge societal problem that must be solved in order to counteract climate change. Forests, grasslands, and soil must be regenerated to restore the hydrological cycle and sequester carbon. How do we pay people to do this work? Chinese medicinal herbs are an excellent choice for regenerative purposes: over 150 species of plants take on added value because they are needed for traditional formulas. These inter-relationships cry out for a systematic, collaborative approach to the market. But we need a new type of investor, one whose concept of portfolio growth embraces the slow expansion of stands of plants naturalized in clean, well-tended eco-niches.

I was close to despair last year when the Blue Ridge Center went down. After twenty years of association with eight different grower groups, the seventh had gone down and only one was left (New York) and that one struggling. The possibility of domestic production seemed ever more remote. I appealed to the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM), recommending that we start a networking campaign to find those new greener investors. This campaign is now in the works, Autumn 2019. We have found one potential qualified investor and need to find more.

Meanwhile, a new grower group has formed among Peg Schafer's students, located in northern California and Oregon, calling themselves the Liliium Initiative (<https://liliuminitiative.org>). Their goals are laudable – heart-warming! – but over the years many farmers have held these best intentions dear. Farm cooperatives fail because they cannot generate enough volume of product quickly enough to hire a coordinator. Coordinators are absolutely necessary and must be paid; volunteers cannot sustain themselves over the many years and even decades required. ***It is up to the profession of East Asian Medicine in North America to set up a well-planned and financed structure to coordinate these farmers.*** ✨