

the compostable times

autumn issue

"all the news that's fit to recycle"

november 2007

the food issue



In Celebration of Ann Arbor Farmer's Market, credit: Eat This! GROCS Project, 2007

Motown gets its garden on

By Julie Cotton

Having grown up in rural Texas, I used to have deeply conflicted feelings about cities, at once mourning the loss of the biodiversity while wondering at the intricate human infrastructure that has replaced the "natural" environment. I have Detroit to thank for altering my view of urban areas.

At first look, I was stunned

by the 45,000 vacant lots that pepper the city, and shaken by the hundreds of remnant industrial buildings that stand as testament to the nearly defunct car industry. As a consequence of decades of discrimination, the primarily black residents are bestowed with a "food desert". At last count in 2001, all but three of the see "Garden", page 2



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Letter from the editors:

Food defines our relationship to the earth and each other. The articles in this issue span the breadth of these relationships, from ways to harvest food year-round in Michigan to the multi-faceted roles that the provision of food mediates policy, economy, and culture from Detroit to Kenya. The GROCS' Eat This! project created a blog for you to explore local, organic food issues in southeastern Michigan: <http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/eatthismi/>. Lastly, only for the most daring among you, a Native American article about edible insects: <http://www.manataka.org/> -- kfoo

Garden, cont'd: Cotton picks insects for urban health

large grocery stores had followed white flight to the suburbs. Most residents depend on corner stores, which are more likely to carry cigarettes than the minimum makings for a nutritious meal. Public transportation to the suburbs for regular grocery trips – well, it's a joke. Adding insult to injury, corner stores often charge higher prices than up-scaled big box grocers.

So, amongst this post-apocalyptic backdrop of Detroit, the hundreds of community gardeners working to bolster their neighborhoods and form connections to this discounted land have inspired me. Organizations such as Detroit Agriculture Network (DAN) provide the education and means for Detroiters to transform blighted landscapes to productive urban farms. These efforts are beyond renewal; they exceed revitalization; they are hope embodied.

I decided to take the idea of biodiversity conservation in fragmented landscapes utilized in Agroecology, and combine it with the emerging techniques of urban ecology piloted in places such as

Phoenix. I'm studying the insect and plant diversity that exists in Detroit vacant lots, urban gardens, and the highest-quality remnant forests. With the help of former LA student Suzan Campbell, Ashley Atkinson of DAN, the Detroit



Middle School teacher Greg Willerer (in stripes) gets ready to weed the community garden with students, *credit: Julie Cotton*

Planning office and a multitude of friendly residents, I set up twelve sites across the city and spent the summer capturing, counting, and enumerating the less glamorous residents of the city. I'll continue to process specimens this winter, looking to capture a picture of the life that endures here after 300 years of exploitation.

It's important that we understand what processes are taking place in

the cities, socially, politically, and physically, so that we can truly build a more sustainable future. Urban agriculture has many benefits, such as reducing the energy needed to transport food and protecting against hunger if distribution is disrupted. But as the authors note, there is more to food security than insuring calories if a bomb hits. Food security means that all people have access to a diet that is nutritionally sufficient and culturally appropriate.

Urban agriculture supplements a poor diet, builds community, improves personal safety and property value, and provides alternative income streams. It offers opportunities to

women and other groups that are often disenfranchised or unable to work outside the home. In Detroit, where most see the fire-scorched landscape that speaks of the city's painful racial and economic history, I see the grasses and the milkweed, the wild pheasants and useful chickens, and the gardens that speak to a rebirth that only strength and perseverance can create. What a beautiful city.

Omena stew, with a side of waterfly

By Jennifer Johnson

Alpha and Omena

I'm writing to share a small slice of my summer spent studying the changing human and ecological dimensions of fisheries, aquaculture and human health around the Lake Victoria Basin. While the region is experiencing growing international fame (see: Darwin's Nightmare) for the devastating impacts of the Nile perch trade with Europe, I focus here on fishing that actually feeds people in the region. Throughout the summer of 2007, the Kenyan Department of Fisheries imposed a ban (in name only) on omena fishing, the staple protein of many of the regions poor, to protect spawning stocks and juvenile fish, but out of necessity the centuries old practice continued on.

June 6, 2007: Early Morning on Mfangano Island, Lake Victoria

Today I woke to the voice of an angry woman. Coming in forcefully against the rhythm of the morning was a passing female tirade. Rising steadily and falling again I did not hear a single "thank you" or "I'm fine" (erokamano or ithe maber- the only phrases I had learned thus far) but only heard (bellow, shout) omena (shout, bellow) omena. Omena. That I was starting to understand. A nutritious small fish, much like a sardine, first dried in the sun, then



Omena: from boat to market,
credit: Jennifer Lee Johnson

boiled (if you're lucky) into a stew with onions and tomatoes. But why was she so angry? Had the rooster even crowed yet? I searched for my sandals and headed outside.

The sun came up while the fishing boats, heavy with the night's catch, lumbered to shore. While some women and young children washed dishes, clothes, and gathered water for the morning, others lined up with buckets in hand. Fishermen shouted greetings to the ladies in waiting, left into the water and hauled their night's work up to the shore. I watched from a short distance as the fishermen began their daily exchanges with the women around their boats, thinking: these guys must be exhausted(!), and, aren't those 'illegal fish?'

Birds flocked round the women as they transferred their fish to smaller wooden baskets. Floating the baskets on the lake's surface, the women rinsed the night's journey off the small fish, as I'd rinse rice or beans back home. Washing and joking with each other, the women watched me watching them. After the water ran clean(er) the women transferred their fish back into their bright buckets, hoisted them onto their heads and placed a stick on top to frighten bold birds away. They then headed home to dry the omena on large mats in the equatorial sun, leaving me searching

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You can't have your cake--unless you eat it too

By Aaron James

Farmers and ranchers are often considered adversaries of environmentalists. They rip up soil, overgraze lands, deplete aquifers, lobby for expensive tax subsidies, and in various other ways threaten the sustainability of rural landscapes. Organic and local producers are considered the lesser of these evils, but still part of a food production system that routinely burns several calories of fossil fuel to produce and distribute one calorie of food for human consumption. For the informed, this can make going to the grocery store a dubious undertaking. For the conservation minded, it can make agriculture the problem.

I am writing to share a different perspective. I had an internship in Montana this summer with the Rural Landscape Institute working to support sustainable small-scale farming and ranching. I began the summer very critical of agriculture, particularly the cattle ranching that has overgrazed so many Western landscapes. I left with a deep appreciation of those who serve as stewards of our rural lands.

The damage caused by cattle

grazing has fed my distaste for beef. I spent most of this summer looking for bison on menus and in grocery stores to assuage my carnivorous guilt. Through my internship, however, I learned how the right kind of cattle grazing



Real-life cowboys: Aaron James saddled up

not only sustains a landscape but actually enhances soil biology, stops invasive species, and creates sanctuaries for endangered wildlife. It turns out that ranching may hold a key to the revival of western landscapes, especially when grazed in a way that mimics ancient patterns of buffalo herds.

Even more shocking is the distinct possibility that ancient buffalo herds were themselves cultivated within a very intentionally

managed ecosystem (along with much of the rich biodiversity of the Amazon). Hunters and gatherers of the Americas may have been far more sophisticated in their interaction with the landscape than we sometimes give them credit for.

And perhaps we're just like cows. Perhaps we also hold a key to reviving the landscapes that our species has decimated. Maybe instead of protecting, preserving, and conserving nature away from human interaction, we might try to shape this interaction in a way that serves our needs along with the needs of healthy, rich, and vibrant landscapes. The idea holds possibility for restoring our

ecosystems and at the same time restoring our place within them. That, I think, is a beautiful thing.

Small-scale farmers and ranchers have an irreplaceable knowledge of the land. They can be our partners in creating ecosystem health and sustainability. And while we work together to enhance our environment, they might be nice enough to continue to feed us along the way.

Know your farmer--that is, that guy on the 3rd floor

By Shannon Brines

Hoophouse Farmer: the interview. Brines talks food, politics, and his vision for local economies

Compostable Times: So we thought you were the school GIS consultant up on the 3rd floor. What's this about you having a farm and selling produce at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market?

Shannon Brines: Yes, I'm a man of many interests. I live in town but a few years ago I started a small farm operation – Brines Farm - on the land I grew up on about 12 miles away in Dexter. I sell produce year-round with my main focus being utilizing a hoophouse to provide fresh produce even during the coldest months: say October through the winter to May.

CT: Hoophouse?

SB: It's basically an affordable passive solar greenhouse: any sort of frame structure covered with flexible greenhouse film instead of glass. In this case I have a frame made out of galvanized steel hoops – hence the hoophouse name – but frankly you could make the frame out of anything. I'd like to make an A-frame with black locust

trees at the farm, build a straw bale type wall along the north side, and cover that with film for a future greenhouse.

CT: And this hoophouse allows you to grow year-round in Southeastern Michigan?



Cold hardy crops inside the Brines Farm hoophouse, Winter 2005, credit: Shannon Brines

SB: Well, technically, it allows me to harvest year-round. Crops aren't always doing a lot of growing during the coldest portions of winter but they are able to be maintained. And except for during the most bitter cold spells, I can usually get in there before market each week and harvest. The key is to work with the seasons by planting things like cold hardy greens in the fall and letting them grow to decent sizes

before the light and temperature conditions sort of stall, although growth really takes off again in February as the sunlight returns.

CT: And you never have to add any heat?

SB: No, the sun does that. I just try to retain as much of that heat at ground level as possible. All the crops are planted directly into a healthy compost soil. During the coldest times they are covered with what's called a floating row cover fabric, which essentially creates another smaller hoophouse inside the main hoophouse.

CT: And exactly what kinds of things are you able to provide through the winter then?

SB: This will be my third winter of offering fresh

specialty greens including a winter salad mix, spinach, arugula, asian greens, and things like Hakurei turnips and baby pac choi. I pretty much sell them exclusively at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market which is open year-round on Saturdays.

CT: What was your motivation to do something like this?

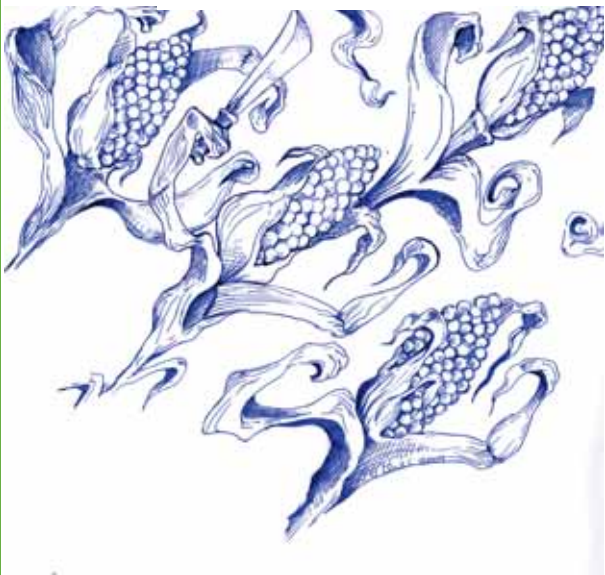
SB: The short answer is that this is my stab at demonstrating *continued on page 10*

The CT staff asked some SNREds to put pen to paper to express their ideas related to food. The results are shown on these pages, as well as the back cover.

Artist: Jesse Lewis
Title: March of the Corn
Media: ball point pen



Artist: José González
Title: Mexica
Media: micron pen



Artist: Sara Turner
Title: Convivial Rectangle
Media: etching



Artist: José González
Title: Mexicana
Media: micron pen



Dean Bierbaum stresses importance of GCC adaptation

By Rosina Bierbaum

Welcome – and welcome back!

It seems that each week new findings are reported on the impacts of climate change, and it is becoming increasingly clear that as a society we must rapidly adopt not only mitigation measures but also adaptation strategies if we hope to avoid ‘dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’, the goal of the world’s Framework Convention on Climate Change. The topic of climate change and what can be done about it is foremost on the agendas of many policy-makers and, more importantly, the public.

I was invited to speak about climate change in many venues, including at Sundance to mayors from all around the country interested in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Annual Meeting (a binational coalition of local officials) on how their communities can cope with climate change; and to the Great Lakes Commission, a binational public agency dedicated to preserving our natural resources in the face of climate change.

Funders are increasingly interested as well: the Kresge Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Congressional Science Committee have all asked for the School’s



Summit Climate group smiles for the camera,
credit: Dean's Office

help in how they can incorporate adaptation to climate change into their long-term research and planning strategies.

September also brought a flurry of interest in the findings of the first National Summit on Coping with Climate Change which SNRE hosted last May. I had the opportunity to brief 120 Congressional staffers on options available to institutions, firms, and societies for adapting and responding to climate change, during a week when UN Secretary-

General Ban Ki-moon convened an unprecedented high-level gathering of world leaders on the same topic. In addition, I moderated the first session on Protecting Tropical Forests at the Clinton Global Initiative’s annual meeting in New York. My panelists included: Jane Goodall, whose work on chimps and conservation is legendary; Governor Braga from Brazil who is protecting huge tracts of rainforest; Franz Tattenbach who runs an NGO in Costa Rica (FUNDECOR) that is paying farmers to protect trees; and Stu Eisenstat who negotiated the Kyoto Protocol on behalf of the US in 1997 (You can see

the videos of the 2 sessions at :
http://video.clintonglobalinitiative.org/health_cast/player_cgi2007_nointro.cfm?id=3499

and at:
[http://video.clintonglobalinitiative.org/health_cast/player_cgi2007_nointro.cfm?id=3604.](http://video.clintonglobalinitiative.org/health_cast/player_cgi2007_nointro.cfm?id=3604))

Climate change is also a topic of increasing focus at the World Bank; I was invited to brief their Executive Directors from around the world on adaptation needs—the first
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Dean Brown discusses summit, faculty research

By Dan Brown

It is great to be back into the swing of the new school year, after the slower pace of summer in Ann Arbor (which is also nice). I feel very fortunate, and that we are all fortunate, to be part of a community that values scholarship that is rigorous, integrative, and beneficial to society. The more I learn about the work all my colleagues and of our students, the more I appreciate the thoughtfulness and effort that goes into it. One of the most exciting things about being in SNRE is the opportunity for conducting research that addresses difficult problems from a variety of different perspectives. With this column I'll bring your attention two developments along these lines over the summer.

The first was the National Summit on Coping with Climate Change, which we hosted last May. In case you missed it, the Summit was an invigorating affair (based on reports from attendees) that addressed a challenge that we face across all aspects of our society. While we heard some cautiousness from the environmental NGO community about focusing on the need for adaptation to climate change,

for fear that it would deflect attention from the desperate need to mitigate the causes, most came to understand, through some excellent plenary addresses, that we face a number of changes that our society and resource managers need to deal with, regardless of how quickly we can reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The basic premise of the meeting was that we need to continue, even redouble, our efforts to mitigate climate change, but we will also need to adapt to some changes.

A relatively large group of faculty and students contributed to defining the questions and facilitating discussions about how climate change will affect public

health, water quality, fisheries, and energy systems, and the mechanisms for adaptation within the public and private sectors. Perhaps the most animated discussions arose in response to scenarios that were presented in discussion groups. The scenarios were both plausible and somewhat daunting in the range of natural and societal impacts that they would have. Examples include: (1) The average levels of the Great Lakes will fall five feet below current levels by 2100.; (2) Increased frequency of extreme heat events leads to failure of the power grid
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Summit on Climate Change: a view from the back, *credit: Dan Brown*

Holler feast

By Jennifer Dowdell

Frog Holler Farm is tucked away on a dirt road, nestled among woods and wetlands near Brooklyn, Michigan. And this year they celebrated their 35th anniversary with a harvest festival and farm open house in mid September.

We were rewarded with a gorgeous day of music and fresh farm-fueled foods with friends and family of the Kings, the family who has owned and run this organic farm for the last several decades. We munched on fresh baked apples, some of the famous Frog Holler salad mix and other harvest treats. And as the sun set huge bonfires were lit to keep us warm. The waxing moon rose above the natural amphitheatre where we were treated to the talents of musicians including SNRE alum Joe Reilly. And then some camped out for a peaceful night under the stars. I couldn't think of a better way to spend a fall day celebrating the bounty and beauty found in southeastern Michigan!

Know your farmer, continued

sustainable agriculture. A longer answer is that this undertaking is a synthesis of some of my interests, including design, permaculture, and good food, as well as thinking

been quite positive then?

SB: Phenomenal really. Pardon the pun but there really is a growing hunger for local, slow food produced in a sustainable manner,

especially anything fresh during the winter.

CT: Can SNRE students get involved somehow?

SB: Well, I'm always happy to talk about sustainable agriculture happenings in this area. There are some resources on my farm website brines.org.

Tours & volunteer work-days are possible at my farm. I'm also



Joe Reilly performs at the Frog Holler harvest fest, credit: Jennifer Dowdell

of ways to strengthen agrarian values and the local economy and community. The charge of making our entire world sustainable can be overwhelming. So I like to focus on components we are most certainly going to need, envision scenarios that have positive impacts from every angle, and then, most importantly, try them out!

CT: So we take it response has

hoping to interest some students in conducting a life-cycle analysis of my operation to quantify how close my produce is to being carbon-neutral. More generally, I'd say a student can try to vote with his or her dollars by supporting local farmers, and businesses for that matter, that share his or her values.

CT: Thanks Shannon.

SB: You're welcome.

Brown, cont'd

heat events leads to failure of the power grid on the scale of the recent Midwest/East events once every five years?; and (3) Your region is ten years into a severe drought and it's affecting grazing, fire frequency and water availability. Just thinking through the implications and possible responses to these situations brought into stark relief the challenges we are going to face, especially as multiple scenarios play out simulta-neously.

The spea-kers and attendees of the Summit represented an all-star line up of participants from academia, government (at all levels) and industry (with obvious thanks to Rosina's extensive contact list). The success of the meeting was thanks in large part to the hard work of Jan McAlpine, our visiting fellow from the US Department of State, and Andrew Fotinos, now a fellow student but then a member of the staff, who actually made the event possible. We are still working to produce the proceedings from the meeting and hope that it spurs creative thinking among faculty and students and development of new research projects that lead us to solutions to these very difficult problems.

Omena Stew, cont'd

Only a few dried omena would be consumed on the island. Most would be packed into large plastic sacks and taken on wooden canoes to the mainland. Once on land, the fish feed the hungry as far as the DRC or southern Sudan where drought, war and poverty makes protein precious. Others would be traded locally providing reliable protein to those with access to the flow of fish, while many more still would be ground up into animal feed.

As the fishermen headed home or to the fish banda for rounds of cards and channa (local brew) I headed back inside for cup of instant Afri-café and asked around. Had anyone noticed the commotion earlier? "No." Was the fishing ban changing life on the island? "Not really." Could we have an omena stew for dinner that night? "Of course."



Bierbaum, cont'd

about how we can use adaptation to climate change as an 'umbrella' for SNRE to link teaching, research, and service within the School. We already have a great many faculty who are acknowledged experts; I believe we have a tremendous opportunity to become the 'go-to' institution for research and information on adaptation to climate change. Please share you thoughts on this with me and the Associate Deans, Dan Brown and Dave Allan.

Upcoming events:

§ Associate Deans Dave Allan, Dan Brown and I look forward to talking with you at our next Community Coffee, November 13 at 2 pm in the Ford Commons;

§ The Dean's Speaker Series and the Center for Sustainable Systems present the 7th Annual Peter M. Wege Lecture, "The Road to Sustainable Transportation," with Ford Motor Company Executive Chair Bill Ford, Jr. on November 13 at 5 pm in Rackham Auditorium;

§ SNRE will join Yale, Duke and USC-Santa Barbara in hosting joint recruiting events in San Francisco (November 15) and Boston (November 29);

§ And mark December 12 at 4 pm on your calendar – it's SNRE's annual Winter Solstice party!



**Mixed Media Collage
Katie Goodall**

Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán becomes the democratically-elected president of Guatemala in 1951. In 1952, he enacts land reform to more equitably distribute land to the population, expropriating only unused portions of large plantations. One large plantation, operated by the US-owned United Fruit Company, didn't like that so much. The US Secretary of State and the Director of the CIA are brothers, and have close ties with United Fruit. So as these stories go, the CIA claims Árbenz is a commie threat, defames his name with pirate radio and other communications, and in 1954, overthrew Árbenz's government. Oh, and there are some bananas in there somewhere, too.

(No assassination, actually, but he did die mysteriously years later in his bathtub)

**Sunshine Garden, South Williamsburg, NYC
M'Lis Bartlett
Gardener Unknown**

Tucked between bodegas and old brownstones, the Sunshine Garden sits at the intersection of an old Polish and Puerto Rican neighborhood. Organized by Zorida and her sister who hold meetings in English and Spanish, the Sunshine Garden is home to a 500 gallon rainwater harvesting system installed by the Council on the Environment of NYC. The tank sits at the back of the garden, just behind the flowering pear tree and the Squash sign.

