

ROLLING PRAIRIE

notes from rolling prairie farmers alliance

WEEK OF OCTOBER 25
2009

Coming Up

Thanks for
eating!



As the 2009 season winds down we want to thank you for sticking with us through our sixteenth season. Some of you have been with us from the beginning; others just started this year. Whether you are a Rolling Prairie veteran or a newcomer, we hope you enjoy our true community of farmers and eaters as much as we do.

Of course, we always welcome your feedback on how we are doing, especially if something is not up to the high standards we set for ourselves. At our winter meetings we will be looking back on the season and considering ways to improve next year, so it is not too late to give us your input. Just email me at sandheron@rollingprairie.net, and I will share your thoughts with the rest of the farmers.

Here's wishing you a healthy winter season. We hope to see you again in the Spring!



MICHAEL POLLAN :
IN DEFENSE OF FOOD

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

EAT FOOD * NOT TOO MUCH * MOSTLY
PLANTS

JAPAN REFLECTIONS BY STEPHANIE BARROWS

In June 2009, ten regional activists, researchers and farmers visited Saitama, Japan, as part of an agricultural exchange program. Sponsored by Global Partners for Local Organic Foods and the International Foundation of Organic Agriculture Movements-Japan, this tour re-ignited my own interest in how lessons from afar could impact sustainability-related issues here in Douglas County. The following samples my conversation with Jennifer Smith, Douglas County Agricultural Extension Agent.

Please contact me at barrowssa@gmail.com with your comments and suggestions. May you feel inspired to act constructively on your own wisdom and intelligence.

Saitama, Japan. When Jennifer Smith reflects on her visit there, the two most important lessons relate to resource use and community education. This makes sense, considering her job with the Douglas County Extension office largely involves consultation and educating the public. This means a week's work may include answering questions about gardening or animal invaders for the Extension's horticulture hotline, along with her weekly column for the Journal-World's Sunday edition. It may also feature lectures or workshops for organizations like Rotary or Optimists Clubs, (continued)

Jennifer Smith Reflects on Saitama, Japan Exchange, *continued*

or even organizing the annual Horticulture Camp, a week's worth of gardening-related activities for children.

Finally, Jennifer's work might require her to travel to someone's vegetable farm or orchard to administer soil tests. This duty usually precedes her favorite part of the job, which involves working one-on-one with farmers and gardeners to improve their crops.

Perhaps this emphasis on efficiency explains her post-Japan epiphany about "how much we waste and take for granted with [the] amount of space and resources that we have. You kind of know it, and then you see it."

In response, Jennifer would like to implement more community gardens. Her vision would also provide better access to land and horticulture-related resources for the average citizen. Students would attend workshops and lectures taught by Master Gardeners or area professionals for a small fee.

This contrasts with the relatively new sustainable agriculture certificate program at Johnson County Community College, in terms of cost and audience.

Part of Ms. Smith's inspiration came from a community garden program she visited in Japan. In Tokyo, a farmer operated a cooperative gardening ven-



Photo of Japanese farmers from Global Partners for Local Organic Foods website.

ture on his own property. For approximately \$600/year, students could rent 10'X30' plots of land and attend courses on seasonally appropriate topics (e.g., soil preparation, pest control). Each student was responsible for tending his or her own plot per the instructor's directions. As a result, people felt more capable of producing their own food, an important topic in a country that imports most of its calories.

Japanese gardeners also sparked her interest in starting a professional organization for young farmers in Douglas County. The group would provide support for neophytes and hopefully alleviate some of the initial trial-and-error associated with new ventures.

In closing, Ms. Smith stated her hope that "the knowledge we gained can help us reach new audiences."



For more information

Japan-USA agricultural exchange: www.gplof.org and www.ifoam.org

Douglas County Extension office, including information on the Master Gardener program: www.douglas.ksu.edu

Jennifer Smith's column: ljworld.com/staff/jennifer_smith

Jennifer Smith's contact info: smithjen@ksu.edu, 785-843-7058

* Thanks to Jennifer Smith and Ted Carey for their input and editorial comments during the preparation of this article.