

Farmers' Dialogue Newsletter June 2004

It can be achieved - The world's population can be fed with healthy products. If we continue to search we will find solutions to many of the challenges we face. As to the world issues which impact on this task, such as global warming and full employment, there is much that can be done if society has the will. We live at a time when many in the farming industry feel disillusioned - now is the moment to open our minds to the size of the task we face. For the foreseeable future food production will be the key to the prosperity of at least half the world's population and to the sustenance of all. Small subsistence farmers can find a productive role in this, and thousands are already doing so. They demonstrate an immediate road out of poverty allied to practical concern for the environment. Such pioneers are making an important contribution to the future.

East African developments on sound foundations. An expanding dairy industry around Tanga in Eastern Tanzania and a number of grass root initiatives in Kenya are examples of what is being achieved. At the invitation of East African friends Jean-Pierre and Sylvie Emeriau who farm in western France and Jim Wigan, UK, one of the Farmers' Dialogue co-ordinators, paid a two week visit to East Africa to learn more about farming conditions and support their friends in the work they are doing. The growing dairy industry around Tanga, supported by foreign aid donations and by the Buhuri Livestock Institute (our hosts), is providing a sound base for the growth of a dairy industry at present built around small herds of 1 - 10 cows. In Kenya it was heartening to see the development over the past year of 'The Evergreen Revolution'. One farmer has launched a group that have identified 350 core farmers who have accepted a practical development strategy that covers everything from the crops they grow to the way they manage their land and sound marketing structures. Another initiative, the Nyala milk group, started with 211 members in 2001 and now has 1600. As well as supplying a market for milk they make available technical advice and much needed loans. This started when a few local farmers gained foreign help with the capital to get up and running. On further visits we saw the keenness expressed whenever discussions took place about what farmers, however small scale, can do for themselves. As we flew home we appreciated how the initiative of individuals, the infrastructure provided by national governments, the targeted international assistance and fair and stable world trade agreements could/would rapidly improve the standard of living for these agriculturally-based economies.

Poland 2004 – Back to the heart of Europe. Andy Welford, a farmer in the North East of England, joined a 17 strong group from France and Switzerland, for a study visit to Poland from April 25 to May 3rd, initiated by Gérard Barbé, a farmer in Lorraine, and his wife. The group consisted of people from farming and non farming backgrounds. The aim was to meet the Poles, understand their hopes, fears and expectations as they were entering the European Union on May 1st. Some of the group renewed friendships with farmers whom they had first met in 1990, spending the night of April 30 in their village of Niechrochrz. Margaret Penda, a poultry farmer, wrote on May 1st putting things in perspective "Today we are coming back to the heart of Europe with our history and our culture. Our experiences from the past may explain fear and doubts in some of us. We have joined a Europe where wars are replaced by negotiations. There is no better choice and future for the coming generations. Together let us not allow another wall to be built on the Eastern borders..... We are facing questions, how to cope with unemployment and corruption, how to fight terrorism and how to resist populism? From today we will be looking for the answers together."

Andy writes: "I was struck by the following things:

- The very small scale of production of milk. For example, 150,000 litres per day with 7,000 producers at one dairy we visited. The different levels of technology: ploughing with horses in one place, and then another with advanced tomato production in greenhouses using hydroponics.
- The history of Poland was brought home to me, and the importance of the Catholic Church as evidenced by the enormous number of new churches that have been constructed recently.
- The hope that Poland will be able to better combat poverty and corruption by entering the EU.

I very much appreciated taking part in the tour and I greatly enjoyed the warm welcome by the Polish and the company of the group. Visits like these build valuable understanding and friendships.

Reaching out. Pat Evans and Alex Hutton, UK write: Rural India reflects many things but above all the growing readiness to reach out for new ways in many areas, at present mobilising all possible local resources to combat the lethal effects of drought. At Sangli we saw a campaign was under way to help those hit by drought in feeding their livestock, and cope with the loss of 70-80% of the acreage in grapes. An item on our agenda was to enlist their help at the Thai Farmers' Dialogue. The Baramati farmers responded instantly to its potential. In Jharkhand participation was seen as the ideal preparation for a new drive for farm development in Ranchi (State Capital) next year. The Dialogue invitation from Khun Pittaya Sruamsiri, the Dean of Agriculture at Chiang Mai University, highlights the aims of the Conference. One of these is, "to reach out to youth in agriculture and include them fully in developing a vision and mission for the future of farming. We proudly and warmly invite you to join us for this occasion."

Grass roots groups of organic farmers around Chiang Mai stress the link between farm progress and the growth of a community spirit. The Dialogue is seen as a chance to stimulate new initiatives in Thailand and its neighbours, as well as contribute to the growing desire for policies conceived on a world-wide basis.

Caux July 16th - 21st For many years Mountain House, near Montreux in Switzerland, has been the venue of the Caux Conference for Business and Industry. Over the last few years there has been a consistent theme around globalisation, last year 'Globalisation: as if people really mattered', this year 'Globalisation: Bridging the Gaps'. The conference will also include some in the media who are concerned to know the role they should play. This year there will be a team of speakers with hands on experience from agriculture who will present the dynamics at work in agriculture to the participants. Among the issues under discussion will be the conditions and challenges faced by the world's small farmers, evidence of effective development strategies, marketing structures that take account of weather, environment, growing consumption and bring stability to supply and prices, and the benefits from the application of science when it is dedicated to the continuing needs of people. As well as interacting with the business and media world there will also be occasions for those from agriculture to meet and gain a greater understanding of each other's conditions. e to stimulate new initiatives in Thailand and its neighbours, as well as contribute to the growing desire for policies conceived on a world-wide basis.

Funds- We want to ask your help in meeting our financial commitments for the coming months.

- To help some of those who will be joining us in Caux.
- To cover some of the overheads involved in arranging the Thai Farmers' Dialogue, and to enable us to make it possible for subsistence farmers as well as those facing expensive journeys to get to the conference.

Our budget for these events is £11,100 (20,288 US\$ or 16,713 euro). We welcome your help in raising this sum, and any thoughts on Trust Funds which might be glad to support the growth of the Dialogues in the next few years. Initiatives of Change has offered us matched funding up to £5000 in support of these events.

Contributions can be sent to the Farmers' Dialogue account c/o Jim Wigan Tel ++44 1829741947 or to any of those named at the end of the newsletter. Anyone from the UK who would like to make a gift under Gift Aid please contact Jim Wigan.

A breakdown of the budget is available on request.

If you would like more information about any of the events mentioned please do get in touch.

For more information please contact go to www.farmersdialogue.org

