

The International Farmers' Dialogue

Newsletter November 2003

Since the breakdown of world trade talks in Cancun, the debate goes on about rules, subsidies and GMOs. Removing subsidies can help the world's consumers and farmers if it is part of a considered plan to create a fair and stable marketing structure. Markets need management - removing subsidies without this forward thinking may not produce the advance many hope for! Free markets do work in some areas but not all and agriculture is unique. How can farmers get honourable returns without the over-production that then floods the markets? Good governance and sustainable farming practices could empower farmers to lead the way out of poverty. The EU initiative 'Everything but Arms' has given free access to EU markets for the 49 poorest countries. It has been widely welcomed as a good start. Clyde Prestowitz, a former Trade negotiator for President Reagan, called recently in the *Washington Post* for the US to drop the bargaining and offer unconditional openings to developing countries. Some doors may be opening .

Phil and Margaret Jefferys from **Australia** were part of a team who helped arrange a Cambodian Farmers' Dialogue in Phnom Penh in February 2003. They recently visited Europe to attend a Caux Conference for Business and Industry (CCBI) at the **Initiatives of Change conference centre at Caux** , Switzerland where the theme was "Globalisation : As if people really mattered" Phil writes of their European visit: It was an eye opener to move among people in the financial, business and WTO/World Bank world and try and discover how their minds work. We as farmers often complain that people in the cities do not understand farmers so maybe the first step is for us to try and understand them.

Ignacio Ramonet, co-founder of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and director of the Le Monde Diplomatique, claimed that many of the prophets of liberal globalisation, who ten years ago were preaching it as a miracle solution to every problem, were now speaking out about its dangers.

Others speakers were Jean-Francois Rishard, Vice President for Europe of the World Bank, speaking on the theme, Perspectives on Globalisation, and Jose Maria Figueres, Managing Director, Centre for the Global Agenda, World Economic Forum.

Ambassador Roderick Abbott, Deputy Director General, World Trade Organization warned that the unequal benefits of globalisation were likely to provide the scenario for future conflicts, between societies and cultures. He singled out the clash between the economic impact of America and the values and culture of Islam, which were driving in an opposite direction, We are challenged to achieve a fairer spread of benefits from trade liberalization. If the current negotiations do not deliver in acceptable fashion on the development agenda, which is built into the Doha round, then we certainly run the risk of some form of confrontation down the road.

Practical examples of what can be done came from India. Mumbai businessman Suresh Vazirani owns the Transasia Biomedical Company employing 400 people, manufacturing medical diagnostic equipment. He told how he had turned down a bribe from a politician who had wanted to pocket money meant for hospital equipment. This encounter and repentance on behalf of the politician has resulted in his state having the best-equipped hospitals in India.

Anant Nadkarni, General Manager, Group Corporate Responsibility for the TATA Group, one of India's greatest industrial houses spoke of JN Tata, who was first to recognize that the good of the community, and not just profits should be the main purpose of any company's priority: Communities, he said are the central aspect of any issue.

The time we spent with farmers in **Switzerland, France and Britain** brought home to us the challenges that farmers everywhere face. Very dry conditions meant a lower cereal harvest in Europe, less feed for the animals so many dairy farmers were having to supplementary feed their animals sooner than usual. Issues worrying European farmers range from low commodity prices and higher input costs, consumers demanding clean, green, cheap food and high environmental standards, the push to introduce genetically modified (GM) crops, and the quantities of imported farm produce.

Phil spent a short time in Chennai, **India** on his way back to Australia, looking at some of the projects undertaken from the J.R.D. Tata Ecotechnology Centre and M.S. Swaminathan Research Institute. He visited several of their projects where Indian villagers have been helped to develop a network of biovillages. The basic approach is to launch a pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-women, job-led economic growth strategy in rural development that ensures economic independence and social empowerment. After briefly experiencing farming in several European countries, the short time spent in India brought into very clear focus the differences between farming in the developed countries of Australia, North America and Europe and farming in the developing economies of Asia, Africa and South America. The agriculturally developed nations who are protecting what they have while developing countries with major population densities are trying to compete against the increasing pressures of

subsidized production from the US and Europe. Farmers are the front line in the survival of mankind on the planet because who else is going to feed the people of the world? With decreasing water availability and quality is it only going to be the wealthy nations who survive? *Phil Jefferys*

Puntipa Pongpiachan, a lecturer at the Faculty of Agriculture in Chiangmai University, **Thailand**, has for many years been passionately involved in the development of agriculture in her country. With the support of others in Thailand she is planning an international Farmers' Dialogue to be held from November 23-30, 2004. They are looking for an entrepreneurial spirit, tempered by co-operation and the practical virtues of organic farming in giving priority to environmental issues. They hope to see how successful practical experiences can be linked to a wider vision.

HE Son Soubert was host of the February 2003 **Cambodian Farmers' Dialogue**, which took place with support from friends of Initiatives of Change from many countries. Son Soubert recently met the Director of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), who urged us to continue with our work. He writes, 'I told him about an Agriculture Students' Association which is trying to implement the recommendation of the Farmers' Dialogue through setting up a cooperative in the spirit of Initiatives of Change, in which practical farming work combined with moral and spiritual training is enriching our Cambodian youth. 'Agriculture plays the most important role in Cambodia. It shares 45% of GDP and some 70% of the labour force covering 85% of the population. The Ministry of Agriculture will need to play a vital role in the future of Cambodia in the empowerment of peoples. Democracy will be inscribed in the constitution but this democracy means nothing to the mass of the population who do not have enough food to sustain their families. Thailand and Cambodia share a common heritage, there is no reason why we cannot work together to improve the livelihood of our rural people.' *Son Soubert*

Martin Simtenda from **Tanzania** became involved in the Farmers' Dialogue when he attended a gathering of 450 farmers in Panchgani, India in 2001. He is senior lecturer at the Livestock Training Institute in Buhuri, Tanga, Tanzania and took part in a Clean Africa Leadership Training course from 18-26 October 2003 in Nairobi. He writes, 'One of the objectives is to identify leaders at different levels, create a forum for them to share experiences and their vision for their countries and Africa as a whole, and train them in the necessary dynamics needed to empower them to effect change. The training course that took place is a pilot programme and it is hoped that many more will follow.

'There have been many armed conflicts in parts of Africa including DRC (Congo), Angola & Rwanda and while these countries are very rich in natural resources, many people live below poverty level. People are poor not because the countries are poor but due to corrupt leadership which stifles development. Some years ago the citizens of **Kenya** adopted a Clean Election campaign, challenging voters not to give or take bribes and to refuse to vote for the candidates who did. While this campaign helped the country through the December 2002 elections, Kenyans felt that more than just clean elections were needed and launched a Clean Kenya campaign. Others have taken this up and it is now called the Clean Africa campaign. The Clean Africa Leadership Training Courses are part of this campaign.' *Martin Simtenda*

A farmers' meeting has been called by Carlos Alberto Solis in **Costa Rica** for November 29th. His friend Sr Jose Calvo will present ideas from *Farming for Ever* by Pat Evans, and compare them with his own book *La Reconversion*. He finds many encouraging similarities. There is much concern in Costa Rica about the US initiative to promote a Free Trade agreement with Central American countries, which they fear will be detrimental to their agriculture. This initiative arises from a visit to the MRA (IC) Conference at Mackinac in 1964, which Carlos Alberto made as a 20-year-old student. He has based his life's work on what he learned there.

Caux Conference for Business and Industry "Globalisation: Closing the Gaps" 16-21 July 2004

We are delighted that agriculture will be included in next years CCBI debate and Dr M S Swaminathan, known in India as the father of the green revolution, will speak to the theme "A blueprint for a sustainable world food industry."

Copies of Phil Jefferys full report available on request. If you want to know more about Initiative of Change visit www.iofc.org