



seeking to distinguish eternal wisdom from temporally conditioned history.”

Two areas of ongoing activity for the Sacred Foods Project are (1) Congregational Engagement, and (2) standards and certification.

The Congregational Engagement committee will work to improve the food literacy of congregations of all faith traditions. It will develop and help disseminate a set of educational materials that help inform congregations. These materials will build upon the work of several faith traditions and will cover (a) the current state of food and agriculture, (b) teachings of various faith traditions on food and agriculture, (c) good practices that congregations can adopt with respect to food and agriculture, and (d) the future of food and agriculture.

The Sacred Foods Project standards and certification committee is charged with working to help faith communities understand how contemporary certification standards address concerns about social justice, sustainability, and animal welfare. ■

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Reflections on the June 2006 Sacred Foods Conference

by Dieter T. Hessel

Food has always been a feature of religious rituals, fellowship, and obligations to share. In traditional agricultural societies, religious leaders paid close attention to how food was raised, harvested or slaughtered, and then marketed and utilized. But today's monotheistic faith communities embedded in mass-market society have generally lost touch with their own best traditions. So, one of the objectives of the Sacred Foods Project is to renew awareness of traditional dietary practices presented as laws of food preparation and consumption in Judaism and Islam. While Christianity does not observe such laws, churches do have related traditions of fasting and feasting, land stewardship and animal husbandry.

Another objective of the Sacred Foods Project is to stimulate active concern for the way food gets produced, processed and purchased, and how that system affects those who participate—humans and other animals. Pursuing this subject exposes dark aspects of the corporate food system that constricts the choices or negates the desires of small farmers and local communities worldwide regarding what crops to plant and how to treat animals. Therefore, the June 2006 conference began to explore issues of animal welfare, particularly the misery of closely confined food animals such as chickens, hogs, and lambs in factory farms, and what the religious communities can contribute to an alternative food system that is humane and sustainable.

Religious guidance has been historically influential in affecting choices of food consumption on a mass scale. So the Sacred Foods Conference also involved food business representatives in a thoughtful exploration and update of purchasing pol-

icies for religious institutions and the larger civil society. The conference keyed its discussion to available guidelines for regional food purchasing such as those offered by the Food Alliance.

The conferees learned about current involvement of church agencies and faith-based organizations in selective buying campaigns that challenge food producing and marketing corporations to improve the working conditions and income of farm workers. In this regard, initiatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers became a special feature of the 2006 Sacred Foods Conference program.

A workgroup of the conference gave special attention to implications for congregational activity and individual practice. Notes of that and other subgroup discussions, as well as presentations to the 2006 Garrison Institute conference are available at www.sacred-foods.org/publications_meetings.php. ■

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