

ARC Faith in Food newsletter... July 2011

At the Faith in Food workshop at MIC in London earlier this year, it was suggested that an occasional newsletter would be useful, so here's the first edition. It's somewhat later than we'd planned – apologies!

"This is a crisis of meaning and being, not just ecology" – Patrick Holden, Sustainable Food Trust

Firstly, thank you all for a fascinating and illuminating workshop at MIC. A longer report of the workshop is attached but in brief, it was very clear there is a great deal of interest in food from a faith perspective and that this encompasses many wider issues around food, such as community and campaigning, as well as the role of food in spiritual life.

There was also a sense of excitement at the potential of engaging faith communities in much clearer expression of their values in their food. As Hindu religious scholar & author Ranchor Prime said: "We're at the beginning here of a long road but an incredibly fruitful road, of gathering and building a collective voice of the faiths in this country on these issues."

And finally, thank you so much to Christopher Stopes, Barny Haughton and the staff at MIC for putting on what many people said was a delicious and sustainably sourced lunch!

These lovely photographs were by Louise Gardiner of Twist Design for MIC.

Faith food purchasing network

One of the ideas to come out of the workshop was for a pilot faith food sourcing network in the London area, to help faith groups source food consistent with their values, beliefs and teachings; and to act as a pilot for other areas.

At a meeting last month, Friends House and MIC agreed to lead the initiative as founder members. Our next step is to canvas opinion from other faith food providers in the London area, and set up a steering committee to look at how it might work, so if anyone is interested in joining, please get in touch.

One of the issues we will be looking at is whether to introduce a Faith in Food marque that faith groups could use to show they are working to source food that is consistent with their beliefs about caring for creation. Any thoughts on this?



Calling all green-fingered faith groups

Faith groups are invited to join Capital Growth's flourishing community food-growing project in London. Capital Growth, which offers help, grants, training and support to establish food-producing gardens, is searching for faith gardeners from now to September.

The project's aim is to create 2,012 new food-growing spaces for London by the end of 2012 – the current total stands at 1,305.

Since its launch, Capital Growth has seen many food-growing spaces being nurtured into wonderful examples of how to turn a blank urban space in to a thriving food garden. Current projects include gardens in doctors' surgeries, schools and on housing estates.

One of the salads at the workshop was produced from lettuce grown in vicarage gardens and it would be great to see available faith-owned land being used to grow food.

Capital Growth is a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. It has an excellent website with information about how to join and details of training courses and workshops as well as case studies about current groups that have sprung all over London.

There are also examples of costs of existing projects to help you plan your scheme, details of suppliers that offer discounts to Capital Growth members and you can even advertise for volunteers to help with your garden. There is the possibility of applying for funding through the Big Lottery and Capital Growth can help with advice, although it cannot make the application for you.

Visit www.capitalgrowth.org for contact details as well as answers to many frequently asked questions.

Ahimsa milk production expands

Many of you will remember the lovely Ahimsa (slaughter-free) milk that Bhaktivedanta Manor's Lotus Trust kindly supplied. It had the most beautiful, delicate taste thanks to the way it is produced – by cows that are never slaughtered, or cruelly separated from their calves, or treated as mere milking machines.

We were honoured to have the Ahimsa milk because Bhaktivedanta's farm can produce only limited supplies. But after two years of searching, the Lotus Trust has found an organic farm in SE England to produce Ahimsa milk with a select herd of cows. The Trust is hoping to make Ahimsa milk more widely available in the London/Hertfordshire. Visit <http://www.ahimsamilk.org/> for more details.



Food & spirituality at UCL

Joyce D'Silva of Compassion in World Farming and I attended the Food and Spirituality event organised by Marina Chang (who was at Faith in Food) at the Calthorpe Project, King's Cross, last month.

It was part of University College London's Foodpaths project and involved a day of eating, talking and discussion, with delicious food supplied by Spice Caravans, a cooperative of women, mainly refugees from Morocco, Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea, that uses sustainable, locally grown food, free-range eggs and Freedom Food chicken. A lasting legacy of the project will be the Food Junctions cookbook that Marina is editing right now.

The Coriander Club is the best of the bunch...

We thought you'd like to hear more about the Coriander Club which supplied some of the food for the workshop lunch, and also had a stall there.

Sue Campbell writes: Food for the body and balm for the soul can be found at The Coriander Club where Bangladeshi women can go to cook their best-loved meals under the kindly and expert eye of Lutfun Hussain.

Lutfun, who founded The Coriander Club in 2000 mainly for Bangladeshi women, but it is open to all, has spent years experimenting to see which Eastern delicacies grow best in the polytunnels at Spitalfields City Farm in Tower Hamlets, East London. She and her fellow gardeners now grow armfuls of luscious organic, seasonal produce to supply The Coriander Club, which meets for pick-and-cook sessions on the first and third Mondays of the month at the nearby Brady Centre.



Mhairi Weir and Lutfun Hussain

'Women are surprised to see we are growing food that they thought grew only Bangladesh,' says Lutfun, who came to Britain in 1969. 'Some of the women spend a lot of time at home on their own and coming to work in the garden and cook at The Coriander Club is therapy for them. They know I understand the problems of moving to another country, and they feel comfortable with me.'

Farm manager Mhairi Weir said: "We like to think we break down barriers and provide a service to the community."

Lutfun has also compiled The Coriander Club Cookbook, which is available from Spitalfields City Farm. Visit: www.spitalfieldscityfarm.org or tel 0207 247 8762.

Any news?

If you have any news, queries, ideas or observations, we'd love to hear from you. Email susie.weldon@arcworld.org or sue.campbell@arcworld.org. If you would prefer not to receive this occasional Faith in Food newsletter, please let us know – and if you think someone else would be interested, feel free to pass on our details so they can subscribe.

Until next time – bon appétit!

Susie Weldon, ARC Faith in Food