

The Natural Farmers' Association of the St. Lawrence Valley

"The Natural Farmers' Association of the St. Lawrence Valley has been formed to:

"—Promote the use of ecologically and economically sound methods of agriculture.

"—Promote the development of a strong, locally-integrated food economy with emphasis on local direct marketing of agricultural products, strengthening of the consumer food co-op movement, development of food processing centers such as canneries, grain mills, small cheese and yogurt factories, etc., and the encouragement of home gardening and community gardens.

"—Be a clearinghouse for information relating to the buying, selling, and bartering of goods, services and tools among local farmers and gardeners.

"—Support legislation which furthers the above goals."

The above is a quote from the rough draft of a founding statement for the NFA-SLV. These and others are discussed in a two-page document prepared by Doug Jones after a series of meetings with attendances of up to fifty interested people. After first-rate potluck lunches accompanied by conversations about hay conditioners or types of spinach or whatever anyone's been doing or wants to do with their time, the last two meetings have been quite productive. Topics discussed included affiliation with NOFA (Natural Organic Farmers' Association), better ways to sell locally-grown produce and eliminate the middleman, and even the idea of labels saying, "Approved by...."

The United States is far behind many European and Asian countries in the development of appropriate technology for small-scale, energy-conservative farming. The small family farm is ready to be put on the endangered species list in this country as more farmers have found themselves becoming managers of the "bank's farm", and last year's corn crop (unfortunately still visible on many fields) attests to the wisdom of depending on one crop in this climate. What NFA is talking about is varied agriculture. Most of the members don't have large farms—some have only a garden plot—but there is a common desire to improve the state of local agriculture and nutrition.

Although most of the talk at these meetings lately has concerned the sale and distribution of vegetables, another important function will be to make helpful gardening, livestock, and crop information available. Various groups were formed at the end of one meeting to discuss such topics as Grains and Hay, Vegetables, and Syrup and Honey. A newsletter is sent,

which usually includes a reprint of a NOFA article or two. Coordinators have been picked who have a good working knowledge of various homesteading skills to help give advice and spread information helpful to others interested in their particular farming art.

Besides educating growers, the NFA is concerned with educating the consumer to buy locally. Why? Well, buying locally-grown products is the best way to get fresher, more nutritional food at a lower cost. How? Locally grown produce is grown closer to market and therefore is able to be picked on the day of sale; it need not be ripened artificially nor transported across the country in a truck burning up that now rare item, gasoline. Since it's been allowed to ripen naturally, the nutritional value has to be higher than the pasty look-alikes one so often finds in the supermarket. It's cheaper not only because you don't have to pay large transportation costs, but by buying directly from a farmer or local processor you eliminate a number of middlemen.

Hopefully, the Natural Farmers' Association of the St. Lawrence Valley will be able to work more closely with the local co-ops and with the Community Nutrition Program helping to improve the quality of school lunches. Another definite service it will provide is bulk order rates (this year's rock phosphate order was for 53 tons.).

The setting up of a cannery in Potsdam, aided by a grant from the Village, will definitely be a help to local growers. This will be important not only to gardeners who want to can their own food, but could be an excellent way to bring together buyer and seller—letting small farmers provide produce sought by people without gardens who want to can some food.

There's a busy work season coming up, and most people won't have much time for meetings. The next one has not been scheduled for this reason. Members will be sending in comments and feedback on the founding statement. Proposals are being prepared for co-ops, and tax-exempt status and incorporation are still being checked out. A newsletter should be coming out. If you wish to be included on the mailing list of the NFA-SLV, please send your name and address to Doug Jones, Birdsfoot Farm, Star Route, Canton, New York 13617. A donation of a dollar or whatever would be nice to help defray costs for printing and mailing.

• • • A Report by Ron Nolland