

RENEWING AMERICA'S FOOD TRADITIONS:

AN ACTION UPDATE FROM THE CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS ~ APRIL 2005

As we head into spring, the roots of RAFT are being sown at food conferences around the country and the growing season is just around the corner! Here's more about RAFT in action:

RAFT featured at Southwest Regional Food Conference

The 2005 Southwest Direct Marketing Network meetings in Albuquerque March 13-15 featured a special RAFT event, including presentations by Gary Nabhan, RAFT facilitator from NAU/CSE, Kevin Dahl, Director of Native Seeds/SEARCH, and Steve Buckley, Slow Food Convivium leader for Alta Arizona. About 350 participants from 8 states attended the conference, which was keynoted by Deborah Madison. The RAFT monograph was featured at a book-signing, and a regional red-list of 77 Southwestern foods at risk was shared with farmers, ranchers and activists, including representatives from the Tohono O'odham, Navajo, Hopi, and San Felipe Pueblo communities.

Project highlighted at Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Texas Events

On March 19 and 20th, RAFT's vision was featured at the West of Western Culinary Festival and its associated Slow Chaparral Expo in Phoenix, Arizona. Gary Nabhan also presented RAFT's vision to the Rock Ethics Institute and Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania on March 29th. Finally, RAFT will be featured when Gary participates in a two-hour panel on heritage foods and Native American cuisines at the International Association of Culinary Professionals meeting in Dallas on April 15th. Other panelists include Patrick Martins of Heritage Foods USA and organizer Fernando Divina, of the Tendrils at Sage Cliffe restaurant and co-author of *Foods of the Americas*. More than one hundred culinary professionals and writers have pre-registered, including writers and editors with Ten Speed Press, *Sunset*, *Cooking Light*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Denver Post*, and *Fort Worth Star Telegram*. The overall theme of the 27th annual IACP conference is Culture and Cuisine. For more information on the latter event, see www.iacp.com

Read a recent article featuring the RAFT project, Gary Nabhan's "Living Green" in the Natural Resource Defense Council's *On Earth* magazine, Volume 27, No. 1, pp. 12-13: <http://www.nrdc.org/onearth/05spr/livgreen.asp>

RAFT Research continues with a new Red-list candidate:

Indian Ricegrass Finds Commercial Promise

This authentic American food is emerging as a new gluten-free grain crop in the West. Amazing Grains co-op has attracted over 50 growers in Montana, Washington, Oregon and Nevada to the production of this perennial grain. Use of Indian ricegrass as a cereal

may even predate the arrival of corn in the Great Basin, as evidenced by the 2000-4000 year old Harvest Scene petroglyphs, a Barrier-Canyon mural of the Prehistoric Puebloans (Anasazi) from Utah. However, its renewed use as a food began when Dr. David Sands and his colleagues from Montana State University at Bozeman began to look for a high value, drought –resistant crop for water-limited areas of eastern Montana. Screening many wild and cultivated grains, Sands and his colleagues Duane Johnson and Alice Pilgeram eventually selected Indian ricegrass over other candidates because of the nutty flavor of its high fiber, gluten-free grain, its low water requirements, and its perennial habit, which can reduce soil erosion.

After extensive market and production analysis, MSU received a Value Added Producer Grant from USDA Rural Development to create a viable Indian ricegrass product. This VAPG grant brought together experienced marketers like Bob Warren and skilled producers such as John Sheldon, to create the Amazing Grains Grower Cooperative. In 2003, Amazing Grains registered the trade name Montana as the label for their Indian ricegrass products. Since its first year production of less than 20,000 pounds of ricegrass, the cooperative farmers have planted more acreage and attracted other growers, projecting a yield of near 150,000 pounds this year. Already, the coop is engaged in production, milling, packaging and marketing.

The timing is ideal for Indian ricegrass, because there has been increasing demand for gluten-free products not only from those who suffer from celiac disease, but those who are trying to combat diabetes, autism, Alzheimer's, and multiple sclerosis. The sustainability of this perennial grain will bring the "new roots to agriculture" that ecologist Wes Jackson has touted for years. We recommend that you purchase Montana products from the website www.amazinggrains.com.

Is it Time to Get a Pennsylvania "Shrub" on the Ark of Taste?

Recipes for "fruit shrubs" abound in 18th and 19th century literature from the Atlantic Seaboard, and were included in cookbooks written by Martha Washington and Mary Randolph. The term shrub comes from the Arabic word, sharab, and is probably related to jarabe or jarabe, the fruit syrups of Spain and Latin America. American Colonists quenched their thirst with these refreshing fruit juice drinks, made from cranberry, cherry or raspberry vinegars, honey, unbleached cane sugar or maple syrup, mixed with spices and other fruit extracts.

Although the use of shrubs as a flavoring for tonic and sodas gradually subsided, it has been revived by Tait Farms of Centre Hall Pennsylvania, whose raspberry, cranberry, strawberry, cherry and ginger shrubs were featured several years ago at the Salone del Gusto of Slow Food in Italy. Raised on the Tait Farm that his parents purchased in 1950, David Tait came upon the idea of producing shrubs one year when he was left with an unsold harvest of berries that he had hoped to sell as frozen fruit products. David Tait remembered a recipe for something he had once tried called Raspberry Shrub, an old Colonial concoction.

This shrub concentrate was then enjoyed in the off-season by mixing with water. The original Colonial-era recipes were a little rough around the edges, but after some experimentation, a more palatable and contemporary taste was developed. The first bottles were hand labeled and sold at the farm beginning in 1987 and by 1989 a new

label had been developed and David went on the road selling Shrub. Today Kim Tait keeps up this tradition, as well as remaining active in PASA (Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture) and the Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign in central Pennsylvania. Her products can be found on the internet at www.taitfarmfoods.com, at the Tait Farms Harvest Store in Centre Hall near State College, or at the Stone Soup local foods outlet in State College.

Here is a distinctively prepared food made largely from local and sustainably produced ingredients that has revived one of America's rich Colonial Era traditions. Who can help us prepare an Ark nomination for one or more shrubs, and see the Tait family's vision more widely celebrated?

Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University, a partner in the RAFT Program
www.environment.nau.edu/raft