

# La Bella Farm work camp supports goal of 'a better life for all of life'

by Bill Howenstine

**"FRIENDS EVERYWHERE** can join with Friends in Monteverde and with rural Costa Ricans of the San Luis Valley in a commitment to a better life for all of life in this beautiful part of the globe." Thus did Amy Weber's 1994 booklet, *Gracias a la Vida*, describe the Ann Kriebel/San Luis Project at *Finca La Bella*.

How wonderful it was to share that commitment by participating in the QEW work camp this past December and January with 36 others from the U.S. and members of the *Finca La Bella*

community! Almost ten years had elapsed since my last visit to San Luis, only a couple of years after the purchase of the farm. Although many of La Bella's 24 farm families were already growing crops at that time, none of them had built a home yet. Then few trees grew on the farm slopes, which showed serious erosion in many places, and passable lanes had not been cut yet across the slopes.

What a change has occurred! To break the strong winds, trees of several varieties have been planted as windbreaks throughout the farm. Other trees have been planted for their fruit. In the shade of many of these grow the coffee

"bushes" (often becoming small trees themselves).

The wildlife benefits of shade-grown coffee were readily apparent. A pair of Pacific screech owls



**WORK CAMP** volunteers divide into committees shortly after their arrival at the QEW-supported La Bella Farm in the mountains of Costa Rica.

perched almost daily in a tree overlooking our work site, and some North American migrant warblers tested our identification skills. Hidden amongst all this beautiful vegetation are the homes ("self-help housing") built by almost all of the families. "A better life for all of life," indeed.

So many friends, so many events, so many scenes call for description, but one event especially stands out in my memory as a symbol of all that the Ann Kriebel/San Luis Project represents. It occurred at the small community center building one afternoon, when the La Bella farmers were having a business meeting to

which we North Americans had been invited. Their board of directors sat behind a table at the front of the small room, which had been filled with improvised wooden benches that, in turn, had been filled with people. Still others, Ticos and North Americans, stood against the walls and in the doorway, spilling onto the porch outside.

Susannah McCandless, the clerk of QEW's AK/SL Project Committee and tireless leader of the work camp, stood behind the board members' table and expertly translated the dialog from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish, as the discourse required. The

meeting began with appropriate introductions, followed by a history of the project and an intense discussion of future possibilities.

The importance of *Finca La Bella* to the lives of the *parceleros* (families holding a "parcel" of La Bella) had already been made clear, when one of the *parceleros* standing against the side wall asked to speak about the true value of his land, his crops, the plant life, and wildlife to himself. I knew that Gilberth Lobo was speaking not only from a sense of place but also from the perspective of time. In 1991, before this Ann

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**ABOVE: Carpenters discuss finishing stages for *La Casa Maple*, which will serve as a community building for the QEW-supported sustainable agriculture project in Costa Rica.**

**LEFT: North American visitors learn how coffee beans, some of which were grown on La Bella Farm, are sun-dried at San Luis Valley's processing plant, called "el beneficio."**

QEW Clerk of Outreach, raised her hand to respond in appreciation. This time the words were in English, to be translated into Spanish, but again the depth of meaning was conveyed by the expression of her face, her voice, and the tears in many eyes. The sharing of these passionate messages bridged our two cultures and honored the spirit of Ann Kriebel, which surely was with us.

The QEW leaflet that describes the *Finca La Bella* project calls it "a blending of nature protection, conservation agriculture, and human services." We lived in that blend for 10 days, giving a little and gaining a lot. Together with our Costa Rican friends, we were constructing what Cuban Friend Heredio Santos, speaking to New England Yearly Meeting in 1991, called *un puente de amor*, "a bridge of love." ❖

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Kriebel/San Luis Project started, I had heard him tell of the challenges of life in the San Luis Valley for those farmers, like himself, who had no land of their own. And in 1996 he and Eugenio Vargas had attended the QEW (then FCUN) annual meeting in the United States to report on the progress of *Finca La Bella*.

Eugenio had worked closely with Ann Kriebel before her untimely death in the mid-1980s, and the keynote speaker at the FCUN meeting that year was Elizabeth Watson, the grandmother of our beloved leader, Susannah, who was about to translate the message of *parcelero* Gilberther Lobo. It was a setting rich with unspoken lore of the past and bright with hope for the future.

Gilberth spoke of the beauty

of the land and how much it meant to him to have a home there. He singled out the plantain, a banana-like tree, as a symbol of this meaning—a plant that provides fruit for his family to eat, shade for the coffee bushes, and food and shelter for the wildlife. He told of how the plantain, even after its death, provides habitat for insects and worms. His message was about the unity of the universe—an ecology lesson wrapped in spirituality.

Those of us who couldn't understand his Spanish could share his emotions, expressed in his face and in his voice. After several sentences he would stop and allow Susannah time to translate, a pattern of alternating Spanish and English that gave space for thought about his message.

Some moments after Gilberther finished, Hollister Knowlton, our

***Gilberth's message was about the unity of the universe—an ecology lesson wrapped in spirituality.***

**You can support QEW's AK/SL Project in Costa Rica**



**TIMES ARE TOUGH** these days for coffee farmers, because of a worldwide slump in coffee prices. Most of the *parceleros* have to take outside jobs to make ends meet. They appreciate the help they get when you purchase their coffee. Coffee produced at *Finca la Bella* is sold in the U.S. as Café Monteverde by the Santa Elena Cooperative through Montana Coffee Traders. To purchase this Fair Trade coffee, contact them at <[www.cafemonteverde.com](http://www.cafemonteverde.com)> or <[traders@coffeetraders.com](mailto:traders@coffeetraders.com)> or 1-800/345-5282.

## Finca work-campers share joys and challenges of *parcelero* life

by Aaron Goldschmidt

KATHY AND I met the family we would be staying with on Tuesday evening. Susannah McCandless briefly performed introductions, handed the family a Spanish version of the group's itinerary, and then left. Álvaro, Elisa, Adriana and Jeison spoke almost no English, and neither Kathy nor I spoke Spanish (despite the best of intentions when we signed up for the trip). Over the course of the week, we learned to communicate in a variety of ways—broken Spanish, broken English, a combination of the two, pointing, gesturing, and, of course, poring over a Spanish-English dictionary to convey an idea one word at a time. Seeing that the family had two dogs, one afternoon I wrote a short piece in Spanish, which I read aloud, that told Álvaro and Elisa about Kathy's and my two dogs, and how, through our dogs, we met.

Before we left for Costa Rica, we had been advised to expect lots of rice and beans, and Elisa didn't disappoint us, offering them up for almost every meal (though we did have pancakes on a couple of days). Still, we didn't get sick of them, and in fact, seem to be incorporating them into our diet more, now that we've returned to the United States.

The one phrase we all laughed at, spoken by all of us at one time or another, was *ducha fria*, which means "cold shower." The absence of hot water was not the only thing different from our lives in the United States: the howling wind that blew all night; starting each day at 5:30 a.m. (when the neighbor's rooster crowed); inte-

rior walls that didn't extend to the ceiling; the bathroom being outdoors; the water running constantly (to prevent the pipes from exploding from the high-pressure spring-fed water system); cement floors; tin roofs; and no ceilings. As a whole, these things would



**COSTA RICAN and norteamericano work-campers create community at Finca la Bella, undeterred by language barriers.**

probably suggest rural poverty in the United States, but it was normalcy in San Luis, and it was more than adequate. We had a warm, dry bed to sleep in, we had more than enough to eat, and we could shower. We learned that having these things is enough, despite the many additional things we have in our everyday lives.

Our experience at *Finca la Bella* was not limited to work on *La Casa Maple* or beautifying the kindergarten. Among other things, we had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the farm and growing coffee. One morning there were two tours of parcels, those of Olivier (the foreman for our work on *La Casa Maple*) and of Gilberth. Olivier showed us some of his coffee plants and took us on a hike through a forest path on his parcel. Gilberth showed us his coffee and other plants. He has grown many varieties of fruits and

vegetables and is constantly experimenting with new possibilities. Both Olivier and Gilberth spoke at length about the history of *Finca la Bella*, the different types of coffee, and the challenges confronting the *parceleros* (e.g., fungi that attack the coffee plants).

Elisa makes crafts for a women's cooperative in Monteverde. Kathy bought up most of Elisa's stock that she had at home. Later, Álvaro suggested that Elisa sew birds on our hats, Kathy with a quetzal, and I with a toucan. We will think of San Luis every time we wear them. ❖

### *Work camp reflections by Debbie Amato, 13 years old*

**THIS TRIP** to Finca La Bella, Costa Rica has been an opportunity to experience and discover another culture by living in it.

Our work team started out as just strangers, but we quickly became friends, which later became essential for teamwork. This experience has had both physical and spiritual benefits. While hauling cement and sand, sawing windows, and digging holes, I have grown stronger. Spiritually, I have landed in a peaceful wonderland where I am so far from the minor woes of my life, that I can assist in more important things such as my family, community building, and the Costa Ricans.

I am thankful that I have been given the chance to see another side of life, and help in any way that I am able. I have always known of poverty, but to see and feel it like this in ones that I have grown to love is extraordinarily moving. I now want to find more projects like this in Costa Rica and in other locations so I can help the greater community as best I can.

## La Bella Farm taking new steps in developing as a mature community

by Barbara Williamson  
QEW Steering Committee clerk

**I WAS ONE OF** the 37 people fortunate enough to participate in a work camp at QEW-supported *Finca la Bella* (the Beautiful Farm) over the recent Christmas/New Year holidays. It was a privilege to see first-hand the many ways that *Finca la Bella* is beginning a new stage in its development as a mature community.

Formerly landless farm families have renewable leases to 24 parcels on the farm's 122 acres, and about 40 acres have been set aside as a forest preserve.

The *parceleros* use hand cultivation, have minimized or eliminated chemical use, and have planted many windbreaks. A community kindergarten prepares young children for first grade. A two-room clinic, staffed by government employees and community volunteers one day a week, was built on the farm. QEW members who are health care professionals have also volunteered their services at *Finca la Bella*. A farmers' association has been formed, and *parceleros* have participated in agricultural exchange programs in the U.S. and Canada. Farmers have attended courses in organic agriculture, accounting, marketing, biodynamic agriculture, organizational dynamics, and tourism. A grant-funded nursery produces native fast-growing trees for windbreaks, fruit trees, and forest trees for birds.

It took a little more time than planned and more complications than expected to get 37 people from all over the United States from our hotel in Alajuela to a village four hours northwest of San José; but we managed to get ev-

eryone with all their luggage to their host family's home.

Plans were for us to work on completing the community building, *La Casa Maple*. A lot of construction work did get done, but



**Barbara Williamson, right, supervises work on *La Casa Maple*, the farm's new community building.**

like any farm there were many other chores that needed doing. Someone had to look after the children. There were beans to pick and shell, coffee to pick, butterflies to paint, and even meetings to attend. We learned about coffee, from planting to processing.

Some of the more adventurous of the group climbed to the Amapala Lodge on the new Pacific Slope Trail (modeled after the Appalachian Trail) on New Years Eve and even did volunteer work there before hiking back to *La Casa Maple*. On Sunday, January 2nd, we worshipped with Monteverde Friends (for the first time since becoming a Quaker I felt myself in a gathered meeting) and shared a potluck meal with them before going off to investigate Monteverde and the

nearby Cloud Forest.

In our group we had five children ages 5 to 12, and there were always *parcelero* children around. One of the young people had brought his soccer ball with him, and it didn't take long for soccer to break the language barrier. All the children were involved in painting butterflies to decorate the kindergarten. The butterflies are beautiful—worth a trip to *Finca la Bella*. One day all the children made play dough in beautiful rainbow colors for the children that attend the kindergarten. Our five children also took an interest in helping with the construction and coffee picking.

Also with us were six teenagers and two college students who attend Hartford (Conn.) Friends Meeting. They were busy everywhere, wonderful with the children and a great help as translators. Their responsibility, maturity, sense of humor and fun, and openness to new experiences were amazing. It was a special treat to be with these young Friends. It has always seemed to me that Quaker young people seem to expect and accept a lot of responsibility for their age. The young people with us were no exception. It was fascinating to watch them with adults not used to being around Young Friends.

Phil Weinholtz, one of the students from Hartford, is an outstanding artist and took on the big job of painting the San Luis Valley farmers association logo on the wall of the community room at the kindergarten. We were all proud of him for completing the beautiful logo before the end of our stay.

While at *Finca la Bella*, mem-

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bers of QEW had the opportunity to meet with the director of the Cultural Institute of Monteverde, members of Monteverde Friends Meeting, and the *Finca La Bella* parcelero association about the future of *Finca la Bella*.

Clearly all three groups see QEW as a major stakeholder in the future of the project. It is making a positive difference in the lives of many families in the San Luis Valley and has much to contribute to the future of the area. It also has reached a point in its development where many hard decisions need to be made. The legal documents to protect the future of *Finca la Bella* through a land trust and conservation easement need to be created in the near future.

There were special moments for me while we were there:

- ❖ Getting to know a great bunch of people who thought spending their vacations learning to be carpenters and picking coffee sounded like fun.
- ❖ Getting to know my host family, Aidi and Misael.
- ❖ Meeting with the *Finca la Bella* women's craft group.
- ❖ Seeing our whole group show up for the meeting with the *parcelero* association not as an obligation but out of caring and concern.
- ❖ Our going-away party with the *parceleros* (with local musicians).
- ❖ The quiet of the valley at night with a big moon overhead.
- ❖ The poem I found on the wall at Monteverde Friends Meeting:

*Silence  
is a natural demand  
born of a need for God,  
felt by young and old,  
in all the world's religions.  
In silence we may worship  
together,  
sharing our search for life,  
sharing our quest for peace,  
sharing God's gift of love.*

## 'Mariposa Committee' enlivens San Luis community with colorful butterfly images

**D**URING THE RECENT work camp in Costa Rica, the "Mariposa Committee" completed four projects that were requested by leaders of *Finca La Bella* and San Luis Valley. The committee's artistic and organizational leader was Mary Lynne Poole from Bellevue, Wash. Our projects were team efforts: At least 40 Americans and Ticos (Costa Ricans), both adults and children, worked together. Dreary spaces were transformed. Thanks to all participants!



Costa Ricans and visiting North Americans craft colorful butterfly ("mariposa") images for community walls in the lower San Luis Valley, during the recent La Bella Farm work camp.

**1. A large logo for *El Salon Comunal*, the community hall.** Graphic artist Phil Weinholtz of Hartford, Conn., worked tirelessly to recreate a huge version of the logo of the San Luis Valley farmers association. The finished product, approximately 4 feet by 5 feet, dominates the main wall of the community hall. Phil created the large logo from the computer-generated logo created by an earlier volunteer. The rainbow, cow, waterfall, and sun bring smiles to everyone's lips. Noë Vargas, a San Luis Valley leader, told Phil, "You are my Santa Claus," and at our going-away party he gave Phil a small Santa doll.

**2. Mariposas for *El Salon Comunal*.** The Mariposa Committee created brightly colored fantasy butterflies to adorn and enliven *El Salon Comunal*. The community hall, about the size of a basketball court, is used for dances and weddings, as well as children's fun and games. Costa Rica is famous for its colorful tropical *mariposas* (butterflies), which are often associated with hope and new beginnings. With acrylic paint and fabric collage we

created mariposas up to three feet wide, and then we applied the mariposas to the wall with collage paste. We covered one long wall with 22 mariposas. Tico artists plan to create more mariposas for the facing wall.

**3. Mariposas for *El Kinder del Bajo* classroom.** Work camp participants helped 12 Tico children and two North American children to create 14 large mariposas for *El Kinder del Bajo*, a classroom for pre-school children.

**4. Exterior mariposas for *Finca La Bella's* farmhouse and the new *Casa Maple*.** We prepared four colorful mariposas cut out of wood for the facades of the farmhouse and *La Casa Maple*. In addition, we prepared ten-inch-high wooden letters spelling "FINCA LA BELLA" for the farmhouse. These butterflies and letters will be installed on the facades of these buildings after the building facades are painted.

Admiring the mariposas, the Ticos exclaimed, "Bonita! Bonita! (beautiful)."

—Mary Lynne Poole  
Mariposa Committee Clerk

# A book to awaken the head and the heart:

## *Developing Ecological Consciousness—Path to a Sustainable World*

by Christopher Uhl, 2004

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., New York. \$29.95 paperback

Reviewed by Pat Pingle  
Reading (Pa.) Friends Meeting

**E**VERY NOW AND THEN I come across a book that I want to reread and share with everyone. This is one such book. Although the author intended its use as a textbook, it goes well beyond that realm, integrating science, history and philosophy with social trends, spirit and heart. The author's voice is clear, personable and compelling, even more so because he interweaves his personal journey.

Dr. Uhl, who teaches ecology and environmental science, and conducts research in human ecology at Pennsylvania State University, built a respectable career on rain forest research in the Amazon Basin, but his nemesis was teaching an environmental science course to non-science majors. After years of teaching the course traditionally (the usual lectures, overheads and fat textbooks), he began to realize that far from reaching and teaching his students, he was transferring to them his own well-informed despondency over the state of the earth. Despite his earnest efforts, his course left students feeling helpless in the face of environmental problems that seemed insurmountable to them as individuals.

This remarkable book resulted from his asking, "What...do all of us need to know to become more environmentally literate and ecologically conscious?" "What do we need to *awaken* to?" "The answers came quickly: first, to the awe and wonder of the living earth; second, to the dreadful beating we are inflicting on Earth and one another; and, third, to our collective capac-

ity to reverse present trends and to create a life-sustaining and just world." The author explores these three areas with compassion and authority, using ample footnotes, references, and a broad spectrum of quotations from Yeats to Thich Nhat Hanh.

Uhl begins by placing the minute span of modern human existence in perspective with the universe's age (13 billion years). He places humans in the context of the earth's atmosphere (breath), chemistry (metabolism), and cycles, and fosters awareness of relationships among species, on which human survival depends. Using facts, examples and stories, each chapter invites the reader to examine the social and spiritual context of our relationship with natural systems and each other. Through open-ended questions resembling Quaker queries, Uhl invites readers to explore how to regain authentic relationships and empowerment. His "advices" focus on key social and spiritual practices. For example, "Listening without judgment creates enormous space for understanding and reconciliation. It is an act of healing." Begin listening, build community, "...spend some time each day in inner stillness." There is much here that can speak to us, regardless of our affiliation.

Uhl argues, with substantial documentation, that humans have entered a period of upheaval, a transition from destructive and disempowering "economism" to either sustainability or potential disaster. "We live in a mythic time. Never before...have humans wielded so much power for both good and evil." Hopeful signs

point to the path of sustainability. In order to tip the balance, we need to break our individual and collective silences, to come together to talk about what really matters, and to foster community.

We need to create a new story that revolutionizes our society. We need to revive and practice democracy. We need to practice "power with" in place of "power over."

All of these things have started to happen. This book encourages us to help sway the human path, along with the earth's future, toward sustainability. ❖

### QEW Steering Committee to meet in May

**EACH YEAR** the Steering Committee meets twice, once in May and once in October. Compared to the October gathering, the May meeting is devoted more to the hands-on work of running an organization, with plenty of time for the standing committees and interest groups to do some face-to-face work.

This year we meet May 12-15 at the Cenacle Retreat & Conference Center in Chicago, Ill. If all works well, this will become our permanent May site. Everyone is welcome. Come learn about our work and maybe join a committee! We will definitely spend some time outdoors and squeeze in some early morning bird watching. We will also have time for play as well as work.

For information about either meeting, call or e-mail the QEW office. Registration forms for the May meeting will be posted on the QEW website by March 1.

# Long Island Friends become 'flower artists' and ecologists while creating butterfly gardens

by Janet Zink

Westbury (N.Y.) Friends Mtg.

**I NEVER THOUGHT MUCH** about butterflies until I recently read a couple of articles about them. Then I became fascinated with them: What are butterflies but flowers of the air, ephemeral and colorful? And I loved the idea of butterfly gardens. Not only would it be a wonderful idea to give back habitat to them after we've paved over so much, but we could have beautiful gardens. Isn't a gardener an artist with flowers?

Then I thought that our Friends on Unity with Nature, Long Island (FUNLI) committee might work on such a project at Westbury Meeting, which is the largest Long Island Meeting. Our committee had almost been laid down, but we finally got more members, and we were searching for a project that we could all work on.

The other members enthusiastically agreed that a butterfly garden could be a good project. One member, Barbara Kingsley, had already made our Meeting grounds an official wildlife habitat, and another member, Matt Judge, is a gardening expert who writes a column on the subject for a local newspaper.

We all looked to find a sunny spot among our tree-lined grounds (butterflies are cold-blooded and need warmth to fly), and we found two complementary sites: a small garden that had an area that was bare and a larger place along a fence where the soil had already been tilled to plant some trees that

didn't survive.

Westbury Meeting approved our idea, and our groundskeeper, Dan Bulleti, said he'd be willing to help us a lot. Elaine Sekreta, a member of Westbury, who was not on our committee but who loved nature, donated some plants from her backyard. We had to choose the plants carefully. An adult



**Toni Swalgen, a member of Westbury Friends Meeting, stands in front of a Butterfly Bush. This bush really does attract many butterflies.**

butterfly needs the nectar in certain flowers, while the eggs and caterpillars need host plants, which can be trees, shrubs, flowers, or vegetables.

**WE CONTINUED** planting through August, and our gardens are thriving. Butterfly gardens are wonderful: They are visually attractive, we can get eggs, caterpillars, or pupae to raise (a great project for adults and children), and we can identify butterflies. Identifying animals is a pleasure that goes back to Adam and Eve: It's as if we bring objects into existence by identifying them. The best butterfly identification guides are the *Kaufman Focus Guides*. They have pictures of butterflies with their wings spread out, open, and also closed.

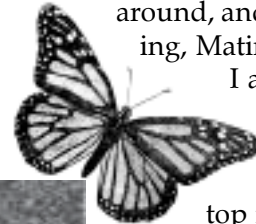
Our FUNLI is a quarterly committee for Long Island, although most of our committee members are from Westbury. Therefore, we were eager to get other Meetings to plant butterfly gardens. I called around, and indeed another Meeting, Matinecock, was interested.

I also planted a very small butterfly garden at my house. I have planted lantana (a top nectar plant), some snapdragons (which are host plants to the butterfly), the buckeye, and some cabbage and broccoli plants for the cabbage butterfly's eggs and caterpillars. Even with such a tiny garden, and one that is also in partial shade, I got butterflies, eggs, and caterpillars. Don't worry about inviting caterpillars to your grounds, even though you will not, obviously, be using pesticides and herbicides. Only a few caterpillars are pests, and the others need very specific host plants. Also, there is a balance if the garden is organic, and their predators will keep the caterpillars in balance.

I also joined a couple of butterfly associations, including the Xerces Society <[www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)>, which deals with the conservation of butterflies and invertebrates.

Butterfly gardens are most worthwhile, and it would be great if the readers of this newsletter would plant some. There are many books on the subject.

If you need more information, please contact me at <[janetazink@aol.com](mailto:janetazink@aol.com)>. And if your grounds are shade, don't despair. Although shady grounds are not as good as sunny spots, I have a list of butterfly plants for the shade that I can send you. ❖



# National Council of Churches raises religious voice in national environmental witness

**CHALLENGES TO CLEAN AIR** and water, the endangered species act, and protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge appear to be on the horizon this spring in the U.S. Congress. In addition, climate change and energy legislation are likely to appear in the coming months.

For the past several months, the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program has circulated a statement for endorsement among faith communities titled "God's Mandate: Care for God's Creation." The plan is to raise awareness of the religious voice on the environment to our national leaders, according to program director Cassandra Carmichael.

The full statement, available online at [www.ncccecojustice.org](http://www.ncccecojustice.org), sets forth all the major components of the present situation: our foundation in biblical scripture; the wide support for environmental stewardship across the religious community; the breadth of national consensus and absence of any mandate; the immediate, specific challenges in policy, and the kinds of responses being planned already.

## God's Mandate: Care for Creation

**WE ARE MEN AND WOMEN** from the pews and pulpits of mainstream America for whom environmental protection—care for God's creation—is at the heart of our religious faith. We come from communities that hold traditional values of neighborly love and respect for life. We benefit daily from laws that safeguard habitat and public health. We are proud of our nation's long-standing commitment to conservation.

We seek to raise our children in a culture of stewardship and bequeath them the full blessings of God's bounty.

From these perspectives, we feel called to express great dismay and alarm at plans by the Administration and the leadership of the 109th Congress to reverse and obstruct programs that protect God's creation in our land and across the planet. There are now specific proposals before the government that would jeopardize public health, clean air and water; sustainable sources of energy; safety of natural habitats; and Earth's climate, which embraces us all.

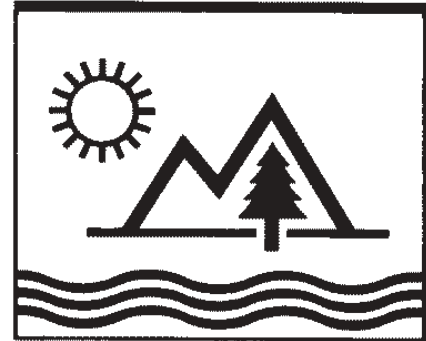
These measures would turn back protections in laws passed over decades with overwhelming public support. Moreover, there was no mandate, no majority, or no "values" message in this past election for the President or the Congress to reverse fundamental programs that care for God's creation.

In this brief statement, we seek to encourage consideration of these challenges and the need for faithful, forceful action.

## Biblical mandate, moral values, & national consensus

**OUR MANDATE** is from biblical scripture. First, we read in Genesis that God beholds all creation as "very good" (Gen 1:31) and commands us to "till and tend the garden" (Gen 2:15). Humankind is called to stewardship of the commons. Second, we read in Psalms, "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24:1). The bounty of Creation's gifts must serve the common good of all. Third, we have a paramount obligation to "defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted"

## Care for the Earth



(Ps 82:3) and to care first for "the least of these" (Matt. 25:35). Care for God's creation particularly requires protection of vulnerable life. Finally, we have an obligation, in prudence and precaution, to sustain the future well-being of all life on Earth, God's "covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature for perpetual generations" (Gen 9:12).

Regardless of religious affiliation, generations of Americans have embraced what really are universal moral precepts: the goodness of all life, stewardship, justice, inter-generational duty, and the exercise of prudence for the common good.

These values have been embodied in bipartisan policy and law from the establishment of the Forest Parks Service (1916) through the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (1948), Clean Air Act (1963); National Environmental Policy Act (1970), Endangered Species Act (1973), Clean Water Act (1977), and Superfund law (1980.) Across the nation, localities have established laws that protect their environments to assure the well-being of their citizens.

Finally, the ability of our science to document threats and of our technology to prevent and

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remedy them has increased our capacity and therefore responsibility for stewardship.

As an expression of fundamental human values, then, there is a religious, moral, scientific, and an historic national consensus on the abiding priority of environmental stewardship.

### Public policy and threats to God's creation

AND YET, on the basis of past policies and recent pledges, it is clear to us that the Bush Administration and leadership of the 109th Congress are planning to roll back programs that protect God's creation in our land and to obstruct international action for the common good of the entire Earth.

### Attitudes and actions of religious Americans

THE VALUES underlying our concerns are shared by more and more religious Americans whose faith groups have been increasingly active in programs to care for God's creation. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently reported that, "In contrast to abortion and other hot-button cultural issues, which divide most religious groups in the United States, there is fairly strong consensus across faith traditions on environmental policy...By a two-to-one margin (55 percent to 27 percent) respondents back strong regulations to protect the environment. Furthermore, the level of support is quite deep." ...As "priorities for religious voters," environment (53 percent) ranks higher than abortion (46 percent) or gay marriage (33 percent).

With such evidence, we feel called to alert our fellow religious Americans to these alarming challenges. We encourage all to study, pray, convene, and consider courses of action. While we are grateful for the engagement of our senior leaders, we are taking initiative from local communities,

encouraged by the power of grassroots citizen action in last year's campaign. We plan to participate in any number of projects, some of which are, for the first time, being announced here:

- ❖ Educational materials will be prepared for distribution to congregations including an Earth Day action alert from the National Council of Churches to over 150,000 churches.
- ❖ In response to the Administration's so-called "Clear Skies" proposal, the multi-state Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign will release a study on the dangerous effects of power plant emissions on children.
- ❖ Religious alliances in at least ten states will present Energy Charters, setting forth the moral imperatives for conservation, alternatives to the Administration's energy policy, and proposals for sustainable policies in their states.
- ❖ Evangelical Christian and Jewish groups will establish a "Noah Alliance" to present theological and ethical perspectives on biodiversity and to oppose rollback by the Congress of the Endangered Species Act.

- ❖ As a highest priority, faith groups across the entire spectrum, at the national and local level, are already calling for debate on the McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship Act and will discuss the urgency of climate action with key Senators.

### Diverse Viewpoints and the Religious mission

WE SHARE these perspectives with great respect for colleagues in faith communities with many theological traditions and cultural perspectives. There will be no single approach to these challenges. But religious Americans everywhere increasingly recognize an overarching obligation for faithfulness in caring for God's creation. Moreover, we are discovering that care for God's creation renews religious life itself. And so we are all called to consider an ancient challenge under fresh circumstances across the entire planet,

*"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."*  
(Deut. 30:19)

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**NOW THAT I DON'T HAVE** a morning paper anymore, having cancelled my subscription in protest of their endorsement of Bush, I am able to spend my time reading more worthwhile things like *Befriending Creation*.

Which I just did.

What I want to know is, how do you keep on doing it? Writing superb, varied articles that are truly worth my time? I appreciate very much, Louis, that you wrestled with the big question as the cover story—What do we do, given the current leadership in this country?

We certainly need to rethink what is called for.

I am not sure any of us have any notion of how to gain access to power for the purpose of Quakerly listening and threshing, so that's the next article, right? I would like to know how Quaker Eco-Witness on National Legislation (QNL) is approaching this. Do they have any specific plans for talking to power? I doubt that any strategy, even good listening and dialoguing, will make a difference.

Perhaps the only way to get through to Bush *et al.* is to make sure they understand that all the recent "natural" disasters are really God's wakeup call, that he's shouting, using the only language available: "*Stop messing with my creation!!!!*"

—Judy Hyde  
Storrs (Conn.) Friends Mtg.

**WHEN I SAW** the January-February 2005 edition of *Befriending Creation*, I knew I had to join right away so I could get my very own copy of your wonderful newsletter. I've put this off for just too long!

Thanks.

—Betsy Caulfield  
Bloomington, Ind.

**AFTER READING** [QEW Clerk] Barbara Williamson's inspiring article which included a part about the "poverty diet," [Jan-Feb 2005 BFC] I did a little math on our own food budget. We spent \$2,200 for food in 2004. I added \$300 for the cost of planting and sustaining our garden the same year. I divided that by the number of people in the household and then by the 365 days in the year. We eat really well around here—our daily, per-person cost was \$3.42.

If I had to lower that amount, here are some things I would try:

- ❖ Eat even lower on the food chain and eliminate all dairy products.
- ❖ Have less variety—more winter squash and lentils, I guess.
- ❖ Buy in even larger quantities and split the cost with others.
- ❖ Buy fewer organic items.
- ❖ Give up coffee and tea.

At our Yearly Meeting (SAYMA) gathering, some 12 people usually participate in a simple cooking dinner project. Last year, I cooked dinner one evening with organic rice and beans, and 12 of us ate for \$4.00. (That's *33.3 cents each*.)

So—eating together and eating low on the food chain makes eating much cheaper.

There was a time when I was a single mom and lived on a very fixed income. I often was left with \$20 with which to buy groceries for a week. I'd buy a jug of apple juice (which I often mixed half and half with water), a loaf of day-old bread, a two-pound bag of carrots, a pound of raisins, a jar of peanut butter, a box of oats, a two-pound bag of lentils, a two-pound bag of rice, and a cheap bag of frozen veggies. I'd

look for the store labels and bring my pocket calculator to the store. I'd scan the "reduced for clearance" racks. These were things that I had been taught by parents and friends.

Certainly, having a garden saves us a lot of money today. I learned to garden from my parents and from my friends. If I didn't have a garden, I'd be buying at the farmers market for things in season or for storage.

Today, being in community saves us money, because we can share some of the costs and share our surplus veggies.

I see a real opportunity for education when it comes to food choices. We have that opportunity every time we talk to our neighbors about the rising prices of food and all consumer goods. I think many of us have forgotten or never learned what people did in the past during times of scarcity. It is really easy to can tomatoes. I taught my neighbor last year, and she canned 48 jars of overripe tomatoes that she bought at a farm stand.

Saving money while buying food and cooking cheaply can become an art form. We need to support each other so we don't always buy what is packaged so beautifully, so that we don't always eat things from far away and we just don't eat so much.

If you have the opportunity to share your knowledge with the consumer credit people in your town, the community garden folks, or the youth programs for disenfranchised, don't hide your light. Teach others how "living more with less" can be done by thinking in different ways. This may be our calling.

—Susan Carlyle  
Swannanoah (N.C.) Friends Mtg.



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Canadians may contribute through Canadian Yearly Meeting for a tax receipt, starting at \$45/Can. Please send check to Canadian Yearly Meeting, 91-A Fourth Ave., Ottawa, ON K1S 2L1. CYM needs to know that the money is for QEW support. Forward this form to QEW to let us know that you have chosen to contribute through CYM.

## BeFriending Creation

**BeFriending Creation**, Vol. 18, No. 2, March-April 2005. Newsletter of **Quaker Earthcare Witness** (formerly Friends Committee on Unity with Nature). ISSN 1050-0332. Published bi-monthly.

We publish **BeFriending Creation** to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Submission deadlines are February 7, April 7, June 7, August 7, October 7, and December 7.

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**Membership** in Quaker Earthcare is open to all who demonstrate commitment to support the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness and who support its work at the Monthly or Yearly Meeting levels, or through other Friends organizations. Quaker Earthcare Witness is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation; contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

### VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity. WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

**Steering Committee Clerk:** Barbara Williamson, 2710 E. Leigh St., Richmond VA 23223; 804/643-0461; [barbaraawmson@juno.com](mailto:barbaraawmson@juno.com).

**Gen. Secretary:** Ruah Swennerfelt, 173-B N. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401. 802/ 658-0308; [Ruah@QuakerEarthcare.org](mailto:Ruah@QuakerEarthcare.org).

**BFC Editor:** Louis Cox, 173-B N. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401. 802/658-0308; e-mail: [Louis@QuakerEarthcare.org](mailto:Louis@QuakerEarthcare.org).

**Website:** [www.QuakerEarthcare.org](http://www.QuakerEarthcare.org)

## Are we being wise or "fuelish"?

**LONG-DISTANCE BUS** is unquestionably the least "fuelish" way to travel, according to the website [www.dimeagallon.org](http://www.dimeagallon.org) of Strawberry Creek (Calif.) Friends Meeting's Deeper Ecology Group.\*

The following table shows pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> that are released into the atmosphere for different transport modes during a West Coast-East Coast round trip, in terms of gallons of gasoline equivalent per 100 miles; passenger miles per gallon; and gallons burned. (*Cost in blood of petroleum use is not calculable.*)

<b>Intercity bus</b> —0.6 gal. /100 mi.	166 mpg	31 gal.	<b>750#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Carpool (4 people)</b> —1.1 gal. /100 mi.	91 mpg	56 gal.	<b>1350#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>
<b>AMTRAK</b> —1.5 gal. /100 mi.	67 mpg	76 gal.	<b>1800#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Carpool (3 people)</b> —1.5 gal. /100 mi.	67 mpg	76 gal.	<b>1800#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Carpool (2 people)</b> —2.2 gal. /100 mi.	45 mpg	112 gal.	<b>2700#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Airplane</b> —2.5 gal. /100 mi.	40 mpg	127 gal.	<b>3050#</b> CO <sub>2</sub>

These are all averages; more efficient cars, more filled seats, or better track and train design would improve mileage.

But the fact remains that moving the physical self across the continent uses one heck of a lot of fuel, no matter how one travels. (I am assuming that bicycle and wagon train are not really practical alternatives. I don't know how the petroleum content of the food required to power that travel would work out.)

How about virtual group travel—lots of e-mail between a few who go and a group who attend "virtually," offering input, questions, prayer support, and attentive listening?—Followed by a group debriefing session in this area?

—Rachel Findley  
 Strawberry Creek (Calif.) Friends Meeting

\*Read about the group's Dime-a-Gallon campaign in the May-June 2004 BFC.

March–April 2005

- ✓ Finca work camp supports goal of “a better life for all life.” 1
- ✓ Work campers share joys and challenges of *parcelero* life. 3
- ✓ La Bella Farm takes steps in developing as a mature community. 4
- ✓ Mariposa committee enlivens San Luis with colorful butterflies. 5
- ✓ Long Island flower artists / ecologists attract butterflies. 7
- ✓ NCC raises religious voice in national environmental witness. 8



## *New e-mail list tracks the ‘greening’ of religions*

I’VE BEEN FOLLOWING the stories about the connections between religion and politics. Periodically I’ve been bombarding the “Quakernature” list with the latest astonishing or hopeful news or comment, ranging from George W. Bush’s daily devotional reading to Christian Peacemaker Teams to Walter Wink’s vision of Jesus as a nonviolent revolutionary.

So now I’m starting a mailing list. I’ll be sending one e-mail every once in awhile, with links I’ve found inspirational, informative, or outrageous, and a short quotation from each source. Frequency will be not more than one a week, maybe less, depending on the news and my other commitments.

I’m interested in the Christian Right and its impact on U.S. American public policy, yes, but I’m also following progressive movements in all religions, as well as work by evangelicals, Catholics, and theologically conservative Christians that take seriously seriously the Bible’s demand for liberation for the poor, peacemaking, care for the creation, and justice for the downtrodden. It’s important to keep track of the distinctions among the various streams of Christian faith and practice, even among theological conserva-

tives. Not all evangelicals are fundamentalists, and not all fundamentalists are tracking the rapture index.

Other religions have similarly split attitudes that are reflected in the ways they take part in shaping civic life. It seems to me that the political diversity within religions is greater than the political difference between religions. I’ve heard claims that all fundamentalisms are similar in their outlook on politics, economics, culture, and gender, but I’ll also be reporting those who believe there are fundamental distinctions between religions that shape political and economic cultures.

A recent sample is about evangelical environmentalists and why they rarely call themselves environmentalists. The next one possibly will be about whether there is a connection between environmental destruction and the people who believe the earth is about to be destroyed in the apocalypse foretold in the biblical book of Revelations.

You can read the comments or just skip to the links. Let me know if you have any feedback about format, length, content, or anything else.

—Rachel Findley  
Strawberry Creek (Calif.) Friends Mtg.  
<[rafindley@earthlink.net](mailto:rafindley@earthlink.net)>