

✓ Greening of the Gathering—sign of a growing movement?	1
✓ Why do Kenyan Quakers have smaller ecological footprints?	3
✓ Current biotechnology raises questions of safety and ethics.	4
✓ How support for FCNL is important for the work of QEW.	5
✓ Earthcare Center's "kitchen" feeds many Gathering visitors.	6
✓ Friends warned of dangers of modern synthetic chemicals.	8

## Does recent 'greening' of the FGC Gathering signal a larger movement among Friends?

by Louis Cox

OVER the past several years we have witnessed a hopeful "greening," or growth in environmental consciousness, on the part of leaders and participants at the Friends General Conference Gathering. For example:

◆ One Young Friends group enjoyed weaving colorful yarns, ribbons, and other meaningful objects around and through collected tree limbs. Later in the week, as part of an intergenerational celebration on the Gathering's theme of "Weaving the Blessed Tapestry," the children integrated their creations into a larger tapestry being woven into the lower branches of a small grove of trees. Friends formed a circle around the weavers as everyone joined in singing sacred songs.

*The Quakers' Blessed Tapestry thus was understood to be an integral part of the larger web of life.*

◆ Another group of Young Friends organized week-long "wonders of nature" activities. Hand-lettered signs were attached to specimen trees and plants around the campus, inviting passers-by to reflect on their "awesome" and beautiful features. Other signs led to a "green worship space" inside the enveloping, shady branches of a magnificent



Weeping Beech near the dining hall. Mats and journaling materials were laid out inside to encourage visitors to take advantage of this special place to experience the Spirit within nature.

◆ This year the junior high group initiated and ran a beverage container recycling program for the Gathering in Blacksburg, Va., after learning that the university suspends its regular recycling program during the summer.

◆ FGC has been very supportive of QEW in arranging space for our Earthcare Center and in allowing a schedule of QEW events to be included in the Gathering's advance documents. The Gathering

Store offers a centrally located and well-stocked display of environmental books. Many copies of QEW books and compact fluorescent bulbs were sold this year.

◆ QEW is regularly asked to have care of early morning outdoor worship at the Gathering.

◆ In their brochure announcing the 2006 Gathering in Tacoma, Wash., FGC included "Quaker Earthcare Witness infusion" in the list of main attractions! With the 2006 Gathering theme of "Swimming in Living Waters," the QEW Program Committee will be thinking of ways to link its presentations and events to water issues.

◆ This year a group of 16 Friends from Milwaukee, Wis., took Amtrak to the Gathering. Maybe they were influenced by the "Peaceful Pedal Cab" witness two years ago by former QEW clerk Kim Carlyle, who urged Friends to consider going to the Gathering by bus or train to reduce the event's ecological footprint.

Tom Fritz of Milwaukee Friends Meeting is now urging other Eastern and Midwestern Friends to take advantage of Amtrak's group discounts in planning their travel to the West Coast Gathering next year. (For more information about how much the

**Greening, next page >>**

## Cultivating a sense of place, by Alice Wald, Walhalla, S.C.

DO YOU HAVE A "SENSE OF PLACE"? The concept is much harder to articulate than I imagined. So I turn to something written by an 8th-grade boy I met when I was a teacher in college:

*"Nacher is sommer, when the tall trees blocking of the light of a soft cool bries blowing through the trees a small brekking streem a grasses band with bright moss laying acrous a large rock water flowing be side it. The small minnoes swing in schools, that is nacher to me."*



can I explain stopping this morning at a stranger's house to ask if I could pick some daffodils?

I believe that a "sense of place" is vitally important for each person. Why? you ask.

Those who gathered at the North American Bioregional Conference in 1984 said it best:

*"A growing number of people are recognizing that in order to secure the clean air, water, and food that we need to healthily survive, we have to become guardians of the places where we live."*

I read once that in America the "promised land" has always been over the next ridge. May I suggest to you that it is right here under your feet?

A first step is to become familiar with the natural characteristics of the places you live. For example, can you trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap? Can you name five native trees in your area?

As the old saying goes, we must literally stop and smell the roses, or maybe even the trash that covers the roadside as we drive home. As guardians we begin to see things differently. When we feel rooted in a place we are less likely to litter and more likely to take responsibility for where we live. ♦

—Adapted from the March 30, 2005 *Keowee (S.C.) Courier*

>> **Greening**, from page 1

Milwaukee Friends enjoyed the experience, you may contact him at <tom@tomfritz.com>. For Amtrak schedules and group rates, go to <www.amtrak.com>.

With soaring gasoline prices now getting more people's attention, it seems clear that the continuation of FGC Gatherings will require much greater use of public transportation by Friends. Perhaps facilitating such travel arrangements will become part of FGC's planning for future Gatherings.

❖ Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., the location of this year's Gathering, seemed to be fairly progressive in its stewardship of natural resources. For example, compact fluorescent lighting and low-flush toilets have replaced older, more wasteful systems. Most buildings on campus made good use of natural ventilation and lighting. Bike racks were everywhere.

During the Gathering, the Virginia Tech dining hall served only Café Montverde Fair Trade coffee, and we were pleased to be eating only from reusable plates and utensils.

On the other hand, we were dismayed to find that the hot and cold drink cups were all paper and that Friends were not allowed to bring their own reusable mugs into the dining hall. And despite QEW's sales of thousands of "Traveling Friend" cloth napkins over the past several years, many Friends were seen grabbing handfuls of paper napkins at each meal.

Gathering planners acknowledged Friends' past requests not to be forced to use disposables, but for some reason the health

department hadn't yet certified the university's dishwashing equipment for sterilizing reusable cups and glasses, they were told.

❖ Even though many of the menu options at Virginia Tech had health-conscious and ethical eaters in mind, we were also aware of the huge ecological impact of the globalized, industrialized, petro-

*When we fully understand that we are not separate from the rest of Creation, we will of course change our way of living on the earth.*



**WILL COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE operations like this one in Blacksburg, Va., begin supplying local, organically grown food to future FGC Gatherings?**

leum-dependent food system that a typical university food service is tied into.

An encouraging alternate vision was offered in a Gathering workshop named "Liberating Ecologies: Food, Faith, and Justice," led by Kristina Perry of Sierera Friends Center in Nevada City, Calif. We were shown ways that food production and distribution systems affect the physical and spiritual health of people and the land. One day we took a field trip to the Green Star Farm & Apothecary, a local community-

supported agriculture (CSA) operation that grossed some \$40,000 in organic vegetable sales last year. This inspiring example made it easier to imagine a time when wholesome locally grown fare is a standard part of the food service at each Gathering.

**T**HESSE observations suggest that the recent "greening" trend at the Gathering is real and significant. But it is also clear that the Religious Society of Friends still has a way to go in developing a true living witness on an earth restored. I am reminded of a book, *The Greening of America*, that proclaimed the 1960s youth culture to be the core of a mass movement toward a more peaceful, happier, and healthier society. The author unfortunately focused too much on clothing styles and experiments in unconventional lifestyles. He underestimated the power of the prevailing consumer culture to co-opt and subvert this movement. He failed to foresee the virulent anti-democratic and anti-environmental political climate that has emerged since then.

So QEW's vision of the eventual greening of the Religious Society of Friends (and the world) is not simply a matter of counting how many Friends read QEW literature, use cloth napkins and compact fluorescents, and travel by train and bus. We must not be satisfied with outward forms but follow the teachings of the Spirit, which is the true source of all Quaker testimonies.

When we come to fully understand that humans are not separate from the rest of Creation, either physically or spiritually, we will of course change our way of living on the earth. ❖

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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.

## It's time to register for the 2005 QEW Annual Meeting & Gathering

**INFORMATION** and registration forms for the 2005 QEW Annual Meeting & Gathering, October 6-10, 2005 at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, can be downloaded from the QEW website at <www.quakerearthcare.org>. These also can be ordered from the QEW office.

*The forms must be mailed back no later than September 15th.*

QEW will begin its Annual Meeting with committee work and business decision-making Thursday evening and during the day Friday.

The Friday evening plenary talk will be given by Noel Pavlovic, an ecologist and QEW Steering Committee member who lives near the dunes and has come to know them over many years.

Noel will weave a tapestry of history, story, art, poetry, science, and natural history, inspired by human interactions with the Indi-

ana Dunes. Singing around the campfire will follow.

Saturday morning Bible study will be led by Roxy Jacobs, Field Secretary for Illinois Yearly Meeting. Later that morning, Noel and



**Noel Pavlovic**

his wife, Sarah Pavlovic, will lead Friends on a hike through the Indiana Dunes.

There will be a number of Saturday afternoon QEW workshops, and Center staff will be available to lead other activities.

On Saturday evening there will be contra dancing in the Environmental Learning Center's lodge hall. Refreshments will complement the fellowship and conversation.

On Sunday and Monday, for Friends staying past Sunday lunch, there will be additional opportunities for exploring the Indiana Dunes and enjoying a relaxing and nature-filled week-end. ❖

## BeFriending Creation

**BeFriending Creation**, Vol. 18, No.5, September-October 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.

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

## Weeping Camel story is about our 'spiritual relationship to the earth'

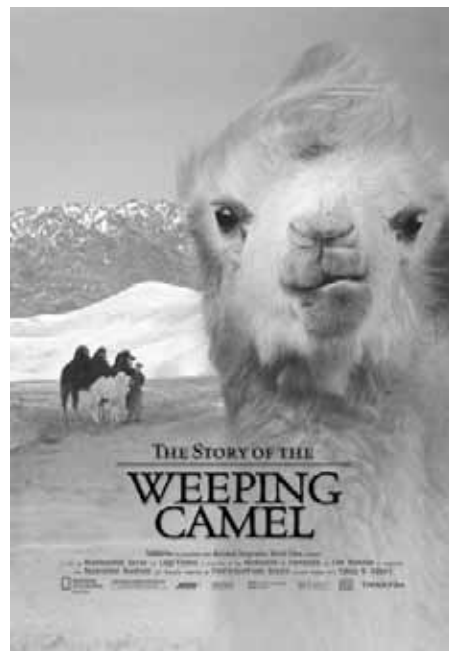
"THE Story of the Weeping Camel," the latest addition to QEW's video lending library, is an 85-minute documentary that focuses on an extended family who raise camels and goats in the cold and dry landscape of the Gobi region of Mongolia. But the video is mostly about a people's spiritual relationship to the earth. *And ours.*

Nominated for an Academy Award in 2004, the video takes us into the lives of some of the dwindling number of humans who still live close to the land. Living in an isolated cluster of well-tended and comfortable traditional-style yurts, they appear to be happy, healthy, and fairly affluent. They demonstrate all the traditional skills needed for not only surviving but thriving in this harsh environment.

The German film crew that made this documentary came to Mongolia because they had heard accounts of an amazing "cure" that traditional herders in the region use when newborn camels are occasionally rejected by their mothers. The film crew's host family experience such a difficulty near the end of the spring birthing season, when one of their camels refuses to suckle its calf after undergoing a very difficult delivery. After many unsuccessful attempts to reunite the pair, the family (who have too many other responsibilities to continue bottle-feeding) send their two sons on camels to get help in a local town.

But before going on to the rest of the story, let us note that these people are part of a traditional culture that holds a worldview, customs, and values that have been largely forgotten or rejected by the urbanized majority on this planet. This is illustrated when the video follows the family and their

neighbors as they participate in religious services at a local outdoor Buddhist shrine. One of the priests notes in his homily that the people in this region have been



having many difficulties lately. The reason for this, he suggests, is that the people have not been honoring the *spirits of the land* as faithfully as their ancestors had.

From this scene we can understand that people in this culture would not view their livestock problems in clinical terms, requiring mere physical intervention. For them the camel was alienated from her calf because the difficult birth had caused a *tear in the fabric of their universe*. This can be addressed only at the *spiritual* level.

So when the boys arrive at the little town, they don't go looking for a livestock veterinarian. They call on the local *music teacher*, who agrees to return with them to conduct a special *healing ceremony* for the mother camel and calf.

First, he hangs his cello-like traditional stringed instrument

over the front hump of the mother camel. We can hear the wind gently vibrating the strings—making a kind of aolean harp. The haunting tones can be felt as well as heard by the mother camel.

Then the music teacher begins playing his instrument in accompaniment as the boys' mother sings a long and plaintive traditional song while caressing sides of the mother camel.

After a while, tears begin running down the camel's face. This is the signal for the boys to bring the calf closer. Everyone smiles with relief as the camel allows the calf to nurse and finally begins to show some motherly affection. Then they stroll back to the yurt for a celebration with refreshments and songs.

Their casual response suggests they aren't interpreting this outcome as a miracle, in the supernatural sense. Nor are they speculating on how a camel's hormones might have responded to the tones of the singing and cello. It's quite simple: The music and prayers help to heal this tear in the fabric. The camel weeps. Life goes on.

**B**UT just how long will their life go on this way? In a poignant concluding scene the youngest boy asks his grandfather if they can have a TV like the one they had watched at the yurt of a more modernized neighbor. The grandfather answers that this might not be a good idea, because they would spend all their time looking at "glass pictures."

But as the final credits roll, we see the family now has a satellite dish next to their yurt, with solar panels on the roof to power it.

Let us pray they will be able to accept this modern technology into their lives without losing this precious culture and its values. We have a lot to learn from them!

—Louis Cox

## Kenyan Quakers have smaller eco-footprints—while facing many quality-of-life challenges

by Barbara Williamson

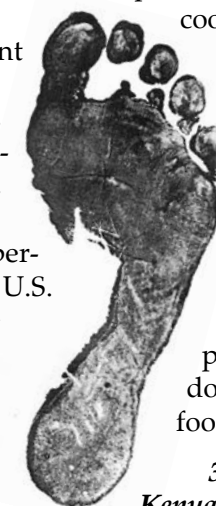
**W**HEN Hollister Knowlton and I represented Quaker Earthcare Witness at the Friends United Meeting Triennial in Des Moines, Iowa, in July, we had the opportunity to meet a number of Friends from Africa.

Some representatives from Kenya were particularly interested in the Ecological Footprint Quiz that we in QEW have been offering at recent Friends gatherings. They found it interesting, but not surprising, that, with 4.5 acres of biologically productive land available per person on our planet, the average U.S. resident's lifestyle requires the services of 24 acres, while the average Kenyan's needs are met by only 2 acres.

I was able to spend more time with Friends from Kenya at Baltimore Yearly Meeting, the first week of August, where I was able to learn more about why their average ecological footprint is so much smaller than ours.

**1. Kenyans live more simply than most people in the U.S.** Reducing waste is important where there are no garbage collection or recycling programs and waste is either burned or buried. Kenyans routinely try to find uses for old items, from tin cans to old newspapers. Used clothing markets are common, and Kenyans will find a use for everything, if only to turn a worn out shirt into a cleaning rag. Kenyans mend clothing, shoes, and almost anything else you can imagine. The bigger the article the more necessary it is to try to mend or repair it. Disposal of old furniture or filing cabinets can turn into a major undertaking.

**2. Most Kenyans have home gardens,** where they produce much of their own food, including maize, beans, kale, onions, tomatoes, bananas, avocados, guava, mangos, and passion fruit. Meat is expensive, and eggs are a very special treat. Except in cities like Nairobi, there are practically no processed foods, and meals are cooked from scratch.



People walk to local markets, carrying their own bags and baskets to purchase the few groceries they do not grow. Most of those grocery items are produced locally and are not wrapped in special packaging. Most Kenyans don't have refrigerators for food storage.

**3. Almost no rural Kenyans have indoor running water.** They use pit latrines instead of flush toilets. Water is often used more than once. As a result, they tend to use a lot less. Getting water usually means carrying it from nearby rivers, streams, lakes and springs. Rainwater is also collected in tanks.

**4. Transportation is usually either walking or riding bicycles.** There are buses for longer trips.

But the Kenyans' simple lifestyles come with challenges:

- ◆ Unreliable or non-existent refrigeration creates the potential for food-based diseases.
- ◆ Pit latrines can pollute the groundwater and contaminate freshwater with microbial diseases and parasites.
- ◆ Stagnant water provides great habitat for mosquitoes.

- ◆ Nairobi, where leaded gas is still used, is one of the most polluted cities in the world.
- ◆ Making charcoal and burning firewood for cooking put a lot of particulates into the air.
- ◆ Many farm animals and wildlife are choked by plastic bags that are in common use for lack of garbage processing.
- ◆ Erosion and runoff of agricultural chemicals pollute lakes, rivers, and streams.
- ◆ Flooding is an annual event in some parts of the country.
- ◆ Trees are being cut at an alarming rate, affecting the watersheds and highlands; deforestation is also reducing annual rainfall in some parts of the country.
- ◆ Kenya has high unemployment and very few of the conveniences that are common for most North Americans.
- ◆ Some Kenyans do not have enough food to eat, and many suffer from malnutrition.

But the Kenyans I had the opportunity to meet do not think of their country as poor in the sense of being either helpless or without hope. They see the citizens of their country as hardworking and resourceful. Quaker Meeting Houses in Kenya are frequently surrounded by trees that were planted to offset the damage done by widespread forest destruction. Kenyan Quakers hope they can keep their country from making the same mistakes in resource management that were made in the U.S.

As these Quakers from Africa return to their homes, let us hold them, their communities, and their countries in the Light, while we consider changes we are led to make in our own lifestyles. ❖

## Current applications of biotechnology raise questions of safety and ethics

by Tracey McCowen

WHEN we think about the emergence of biotechnology into the food supply many arguments come forth. Two fundamental questions are: *Is it safe to eat, and what does it mean to dramatically alter a living thing in a way that nature never could?*

When it comes to the first risk-based question regarding safety, I pay less attention, not because there are no potential risks to human health—especially to vulnerable populations such as children and the infirm—but because, we living in the postmodern world take part in all sorts of risky endeavors without much thought, like driving a car.

From an ethics point of view this really boils down to: *Do we know what risk we are about to undertake, and do we have the choice to avoid it, for whatever reason we hold fit?* The answer to this fundamental rights-based question regarding biotechnology is “No,” unless of course the food product is labeled, or we have access to certified organic alternatives.

The second question is the larger and less convenient of the two. Asking the meaning of technology is most often left to theologians and does not get much press time in this utilitarian culture of ours. From a Christian faith perspective it certainly does not coincide with “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The problem is that humans have not proved very good at choosing genetic traits over time. Inevitably we pick the biggest and the most productive, which doesn't necessarily mean the most resilient. Cattle breeding is a useful example; the dairy industry

always chooses the cows that produce the most milk, in the beef sector it is the thickest cows with the best “steaks” on them. Inevitably, we end up with dairy cows that produce huge amounts of milk but are basically infertile, and short, thick beef cows that don't produce enough milk to raise a healthy calf. Then follows the frenzy of trying to introduce the “classic” genetics back into the breeds to normalize production.

Plant breeding is not dissimilar. Many crops are hybridized to maximize production, even though there is a negative

correlation between yield and protein content. We have become very successful at creating super varieties of crops that have wonderful yields but are reliant on expensive inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. Eventually crops start to fail, and plant breeders must return to seed banks where the wild relatives are stored, or return to the region where the plant originated, e.g., Mexico for corn, Peru for potatoes, etc.

Biotechnology, as currently applied in crop development, seeks to alter specific genetic traits to protect the plant against a specific adverse event, such as resistance to a single insect, or pesticide. The subtlety and complexity of a genome does not allow for more than four or five gene alterations; more than that and the mutations are too extreme to be viable. Even with the alteration, of just four or five genes out tens of thousands, it can take thousands of tissue cultures to produce one useable alteration.

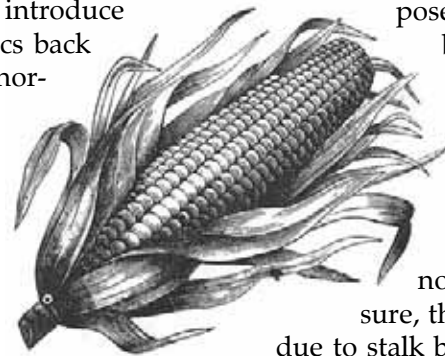
Even when a viable plant is developed through such techniques, the plant can produce unforeseen outcomes, as one of my current research projects has shown. The project is a survey interviewing farmers growing genetically engineered corn in order to determine whether they are abiding by the planting regulations. This variety of corn contains genes from a naturally occurring soil bacterium known as *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or “Bt,” which is supposed to control corn

borer infestations that can result in stalk breakage. What has become clear is that in 2003, when there was no corn borer pressure, the Bt corn failed due to stalk breakage in high winds, while conventional varieties did not suffer such damage.

This is just one small example of unexpected outcomes in today's bioengineered crops. In a wealthy nation such as Canada, a crop failure such as this simply results in larger crop insurance payouts, but to a developing nation it can mean famine.

LIVING and working as a farmer/researcher instills in me a constant sense of wonder; how futile are our attempts to bend natural systems to our will. I can't say that I am against the use of biotechnology in agriculture, but I am very disturbed by how it is currently being applied. Fundamentally, the current approach will never work over the long term, because it does not recognize the nature of nature, it seeks to alter creation, not befriend it. ♦

*Tracey McCowen is a bioethicist working in agriculture. She is an at-large member of the QEW Steering Committee and attends Toronto (Ont.) Friends Meeting.*



## Salem, Ore., Friends event focuses on maintaining the web of creation

FRIENDS in Salem, Oregon, led a second-hour Earth Stewardship program earlier this year that the organizers said was inspired in part by Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Discussions revolved around the theme of the torn web of Creation, as part of the Meeting's Quakerism 201 series. Materials included articles from the October 2004 issue of *Friends Journal*, which was on the theme of “Friends and the Environment.”

Rules for discussion included listening and considering the query, “*What choices do we have? What are my concerns? How can ‘little me’ have impact on the crisis? What am I doing to maintain the web of life?*”

After hearing an overview of the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, Friends talked about how religion historically has been closely connected to nature, and that the rift between science and

religion for the past three centuries seems to be based on misrepresentation of Judeo-Christian teachings and scriptures. A quote from Quaker Rufus Jones was considered: “*Faith is not endangered by the advance of science. It is endangered by the stagnation of religious conceptions.*”

Different speakers dealt with such issues as biodiversity of soils, environmental contaminants, toxic chemicals in the food chain, global warming/climate change, ozone layer depletion, alternative sources of energy, and the need for changes in economic systems.

As each person spoke about a different kind of environmental problem, they cut off a piece from a skein of yarn that represented the web of life. At the end of the discussion, the question was posed, “*How many threads of God's Creation can we cut before the web of life unravels?*” ♦

*Flash! Bill McKibben to be 2007 Annual Meeting speaker!*

JUST BEFORE PRESS TIME, the QEW office got an e-mail from Vermont environmental writer Bill McKibben that he is willing to be the Friday plenary speaker at the October 2007 QEW Annual Meeting & Gathering in Burlington, Vt. *What a coup!*

McKibben's writings on issues of global warming and regional economics and food production were featured in the May-June 2005 *BeFriending Creation*.

### Still a best seller from Quaker Earthcare Witness!

#### Earthcare for Friends

A Study Guide for Individuals and Faith Communities



“The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof...”  
Psalms 24:1

Edited by Louis Cox, Ingrid Fabianson, Sandra Moon Farley, Ruah Swennerfelt  
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### Sale! Now only \$5.00\* *Population Is People* A Friends Perspective

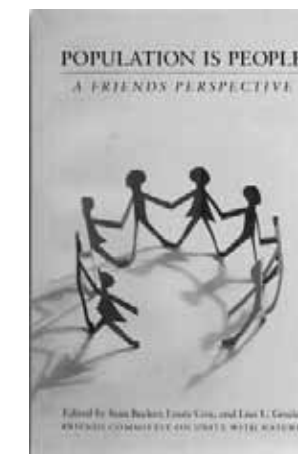
Edited by Stan Becker, Louis Cox, and Lisa Gould  
ISBN 1881083-06-3, 216 pp., \$5.00 + \$3.50 S&H

BETWEEN 1950 and 2004 human population exploded from 2.5 billion to 6.4 billion.

In *Population Is People*, 23 Friends draw on their professional, academic, or life experiences as they reflect on a wide range of social and ecological issues that are affected by rapid population growth.

The emphasis is on compassion, understanding, and responsible sharing of world resources as we work together toward population stabilization and well-being for everyone.

\*while supplies last



Copies may be ordered directly from the QEW office.

## Head of the National Environmental Trust warns Friends of dangers of modern synthetic chemicals

**H**EALTH risks of many modern synthetic chemicals are more serious than thought when these products were allowed on the market, according to Pete Myers, chairman of the National Environmental Trust.

Speaking to an interest group in the Earthcare Center at the 2005 FGC Gathering, Myers said that suspect chemicals have invaded every corner of the planet. They are in our air, soil, water, and food and linger in our bodies. We encounter them in such everyday activities as opening a can of soup, taking a drink of water, or going out for a breath of "fresh air."

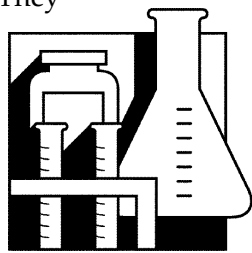
Myers urged Friends to take immediate steps to protect themselves and to support legislation to change the way chemicals are screened for public safety.

Myers said public health research is beginning to catch up with research and development in the chemical industry. In the process they are uncovering more complexity and interrelatedness within the biotic community at the cellular and genetic levels. Natural systems manifest an essential coherence and wholeness. But in modern times they are being disrupted by artificial substances that evolution had not prepared them to cope with. The recent surge in the number of environmentally induced cancer cases testifies to the seriousness of this problem.

According to the "Old Toxicology" our genes are established at conception and can be altered only by high exposures to toxic substances. The "New Toxicology" says that a gene may remain a gene, but its *expression* in the body can be altered in numerous subtle

ways, such as changes in diet, stress, low-level chemical exposures, and actions of other genes.

A timely issue is arsenic in drinking water. Just before the Bush Administration proposed lowering the exposure threshold, research was showing that arsenic can play a role in the development of diseases below 10 parts per million (ppm), a level previously considered safe.



The agriculture chemical Atrazine has been approved for application at 1 million parts per billion (ppb), with allowable runoff levels at 600 to 700 ppb. But current

research suggests that this chemical is not safe for humans over the short term at more than 100 ppb. Experiments with frog experiments have shown developmental disturbances at exposure levels as low as 0.1 ppb! The drastic decline in frog populations worldwide seems to bear this out.

Concern is now being raised about Bisphenol-A—a synthetic estrogen related to diethylstilbestrol (DES). This product sat on the shelf until someone found that it could be made into "polycarbonate" plastic, now used in some popular water bottles. When it was approved, exposure levels of 10,000 to 100,000 ppb were considered acceptable. The threshold was lowered to 59 ppb in the mid-1990s. Now it's down to 1 ppb!

Some 200 to 300 different genes can be impacted at these levels, including brain development and tumor growth. Yet public health studies suggest that many people are being exposed to Bisphenol-A at experimentally significant levels. Because it is used

as a coating inside steel food cans, Myers said he has stopped buying canned food.

Exposure to phthalates, which are used in many cosmetics and as softening agents in many plastic products (like toys), has been shown to alter the genital development of baby boys and in 25 percent of American women. Concern has been raised over its possible effects on fertility of adults.

These revelations have led to a shift in attention from "them" to "us," in terms of who is being exposed to suspect chemicals. Thinking is moving away from simple dosage levels to the timing of exposures, individual or group variations in susceptibility, and unpredictable low-dose effects. More attention is being paid to long-term latent tendencies, compared to immediate effects, as well as transgenerational impacts on such variables as sperm counts.

**N**EW thinking in public health also focuses on mixtures of chemicals as they commonly occur in the environment, rather than just looking at one contaminant at a time. All of this hopefully will result in higher regulatory thresholds for allowable exposures.

Myers cited the example of improvements in public water systems that drastically reduced mortality in 19<sup>th</sup> century, responding to scientific research into waterborne diseases. Let us hope, he said, that society today has the will to make similar investments in public health through appropriate and effective regulation of modern synthetic chemicals. ❖

For more information go to [www.environmentalhealthnews.org](http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org) and [www.ourstolenfuture.org](http://www.ourstolenfuture.org).

## How is support for FCNL important to QEW's work?

by Ed Dreby

**A** TEAM of Quaker Earthcare Witness members is exploring ways to increase support for Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) among QEW supporters. Why is this important to the work of QEW?

QEW became a member of FCNL in 2003, shortly after energy policy was included in FCNL's legislative priorities. While QEW is focused on many environmental problems, we agreed that energy policy is fundamental to virtually all aspects of long-term environmental restoration and protection.

But to make its lobbying on energy policy effective, FCNL also needs us to communicate with members of Congress, and to provide financial support. One way to get more Friends to do this is to explain how FCNL witnesses so effectively to Friends' testimonies:

Several years ago, a Philadelphia YM peace and concerns task force on which I served was asked to identify "best practices" of other faith-based advocacy organizations for peace and justice. From my five years' on the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group, I could respond without hesitation that in Washington D.C. this is FCNL.

FCNL is known on Capitol Hill for providing trustworthy information, for presenting its views on legislative policy fairly and thoroughly, and for relating to all legislators and staff with respect and integrity. These qualities provide FCNL access across party lines and opportunities to help build unlikely bipartisan alliances on specific issues.

Since 9/11/01 and the ensuing

"War on Terrorism," FCNL's clear message that "War is Not the Answer" has attracted financial support from many non-Friends. This has made it possible for FCNL to expand its peace and justice activities, particularly on nuclear arms and civil liberties, and to include energy policy and long-term environmental protection.

What makes FCNL such a distinctive presence on Capitol Hill?



Ned Stowe, FCNL's Legislative Secretary and energy/environment lobbyist, was asked recently, "What keeps you going?" and "What difference can FCNL make in the con-

text of a political climate that seems so antagonistic to Friends' principles? His response:

*For me, lobbying is spiritual discipline just like all other aspects of Quaker faith and practice. As Quaker advocates, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, to listen for and follow God's leadings faithfully, to witness for our values and beliefs, and to answer that of God in all whom we meet. We are not called to "save the world," only to be true to God's leading light within. It is not for us to judge and condemn others. Our central concern is to answer that of God within each person and to persist lovingly in speaking truth to those in power. We proceed with faith that in time, through such persistence, corruption, greed, and prejudice will fade, and way will open for the political changes we seek. We may not see the fruit of our efforts today, in this Congress, or even within our lifetimes. The ends are in God's hands. Rather than looking for the fruits of our labor, we focus on the labor itself—proceeding in hope, faith and love.*

Yet the labor has been remarkably fruitful: FCNL has had a key role in helping members of Congress voice their opposition to the policies of the Bush administration on Iraq, in moderating the confrontational position of Congress on North Korea, in limiting funding for new nuclear weapons, and in numerous less visible ways.

Many Friends are fond of William Penn's advice to "Let us see what love may do" to mend a broken world. This is the distinctive presence that FCNL brings to Capitol Hill: a truly Christian witness grounded in hope, faith, and love. It is also the kind of witness through which a seemingly impossible transformation of the current political ethos may emerge.

**S**O what about energy policy? Ned Stowe is responsible not only for this work, but also for FCNL's work on budget priorities, and for overall coordination of its legislative program. He says that committing more staff time to energy policy would require \$120,000 more a year for salaries, benefits, work stations, program activities and materials.

Yet, of the 30,000 households in the Yearly Meetings affiliated with FCNL, only about 5,000 support FCNL by communicating with public officials and/or by providing financial support! Think of what it would mean to have one or two thousand more households contributing to FCNL's advocacy for an earth restored and a future of peace with justice.

How many Friends are truly aware of the opportunity FCNL provides to witness to our faith? What might be done in Monthly and Yearly meetings to make this possible? How might QEW folk help bring this about? ❖

## Earthcare Center's 'kitchen' feeds many visitors

QEW's EARTHCARE CENTER didn't have enough space this year to set up another hands-on exhibit like last year's Eco-Friendly House in Amherst, Mass. But we did offer a menu of interesting events and programs that fed surprisingly large numbers of visitors hungry for help and encouragement.

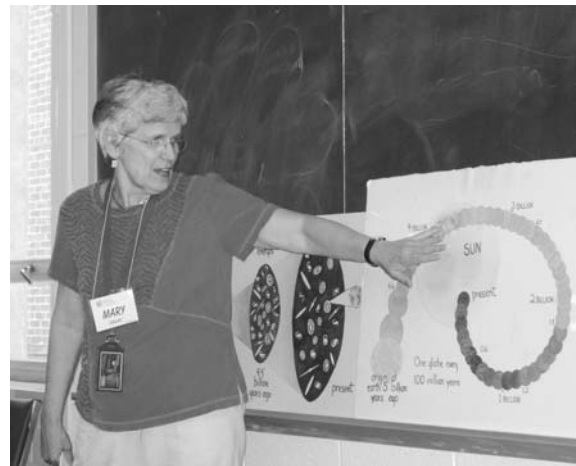
The room was full as I described the Natural Step program that has put many communities in Sweden and elsewhere on the path to sustainability. More than 40 were present for Louis Cox's talk on permaculture as a way of putting Quaker values into practice. About 70 showed up for Jim Rose's campus tree walk.

Also well-attended were a presentation on mountaintop removal by Mary Anne Hitt of Appalachian Voices, and viewings of four popular videos from QEW's video lending library—"The Next Industrial Revolution," "The End of Suburbia," "Beyond Organic, the Story of Fairview Gardens," and "The Story of the Weeping Camel" (see review on page 10).

Leaders of two week-long Earthcare-related workshops—Kristina Perry on food issues and Erbin Crowell and Kristen Howard on economic alternatives—gave afternoon presentations for those who were interested but didn't attend the workshops.

It was gratifying to see the continued strong interest by Friends in measuring their ecological footprints. Signs posted around campus about the Ecological Footprint Quiz were major drawing cards for the Center.

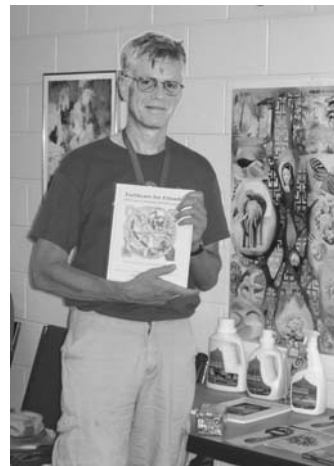
Friends who completed the quiz posted the results on a long wall chart. Many were dismayed to see that despite conscientious efforts to conserve material resources their footprints weren't



**LEFT: Mary Coelho leads an afternoon interest group on "The Epic of Evolving Life on Earth: Science and Spirit Converge in Telling a New Creation Story."**



**RIGHT: Pete Myers, chair of the National Environmental Trust, explains the health risks of modern synthetic chemicals. (See story on page 8.)**



**LEFT: Tony Martin picks QEW's new *Earthcare for Friends* as his prize for having a low score on the Ecological Footprint Quiz at the Earthcare Center.**



**RIGHT: Ruah Swennerfelt helps Friends through the computation steps of the Ecological Footprint Quiz at the QEW Earthcare Center.**

that much lower than the U.S. national average—mostly due to private automobile use and air travel. We explained to everyone that this quiz wasn't intended to make Friends feel guilty but to highlight areas where they might make changes. Many vowed to work harder and see how they compare when they take the quiz next year.

I saw the irony that my own work for QEW involves a lot of car and airline travel. This adds tremendously to my own footprint

score, overshadowing most of what I do at home to live very lightly on the earth.

**ON FURTHER REFLECTION,** I saw that these activities are actually part of QEW's ecological footprint. And the healing work we all are trying to do in the world somehow needs to be figured into bottom line. In other words, the values we work for are as important as the resources we use.

—Ruah Swennerfelt

## Philadelphia Friends Center plans green renovation

FRIENDS CENTER in central Philadelphia, where many Quaker organizations are headquartered, plans to change its image from "Quaker gray" to "Quaker green."

This ambitious and visionary building transformation will serve as "an environmental witness for peace, integrity, equality, and simplicity," according to a Friends Center brochure.

"What began as the need to replace worn-out mechanical equipment has evolved into a vision to make Friends Center a living witness to Friends testimonies."

When the multimillion-dollar project is completed, the building will meet the standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

Green elements of the project include:

- ✓ An innovative geothermal energy system for heating and cooling.
- ✓ An on-site "living machine" that will treat the Center's own waste water.
- ✓ A vegetated roof that will reduce storm runoff and aid cooling in the summer.
- ✓ A closed-loop water system that will capture rain water for flushing toilets.
- ✓ Photovoltaic panels that will supplement purchased "green" electricity.
- ✓ Enhanced natural lighting and ventilation to improve the working environment.
- ✓ Use of recycled-content and rapidly renewable materials in the construction, along with recycling of construction waste.



**LAURA MELLY of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting summarizes the ecologically progressive features of the renovation planned for Friends Center at 1501 Cherry Street in Philadelphia. She spoke during a special interest group in the Earthcare Center at the 2005 FGC Gathering.**

Most of these features will significantly reduce Friends Center's burden on Philadelphia's public utilities, as well as lower the organization's overall environmental impact, the brochure says. ♦

**THE FRIENDS CENTER** project echoes a similar undertaking by Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington, D.C. FCNL has incorporated many ecological design principles into the renovation of its headquarters across the street from the Senate Office Building. Look for an update in *BeFriending Creation*, reporting on project's completion this year.

## Friends show keen interest in 'peak oil' at late-night special interest program

AN IMPROMPTU late-night program on "peak oil" on the last night of the Gathering drew a large group of Friends who were eager to get up to speed on the worsening energy crunch.

John Darnell of Myersville, Md., who works as an aide to a U.S. Congressman, reviewed predictions of petroleum geologists that world oil production will peak in the next few years (as it did in the U.S. in 1970). Falling oil production and continually growing demand will trigger an endless rise in gasoline prices that some believe has already begun.

According to recent books like *The Party's Over* by Richard Heinberg and *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* by Thom Hartmann, passing this peak will change the industrialized world in profound ways that experts are struggling to predict. It will



**John Darnell, left, speaks about the coming peak in global oil production.**

certainly mean collapse of the American Dream of suburban living based on cheap fossil fuel.

"We could have been smarter about this," Darnell said of the failure of government and industry leaders to see this crisis coming. Because we didn't respond to the first warnings in the 1970s, the options are much more limited now. Our only hope now is a crash program of conversion to renewable fuels, Darnell said.