

F.O.M. NEWSLETTER

Volume 18, No. 1

Winter 2006

MESSAGE FROM NEW F.O.M. PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

In August the FOM Board of Directors said goodbye to several members, elected their replacements and reorganized responsibilities. Shannon Brown and Mike Waldmiller stepped down. We thank them for all of their hard work. Erika Harney was elected to serve as Secretary. Erika brings a wealth of experience in non-profit management. She is the development coordinator for God's Pantry Food Bank, in Lexington, KY. Kristen George (02-04, Chiradzulu) was elected to serve as Membership chair. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Public Health degree at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD. Angie Sanders (00-02, Chinguluwe) was elected to the Newsletter team. She is a Peace Corps Fellow pursuing a Master's degree at Western Illinois University in Macomb, IL. Dawn Citrin moved to the Vice President's position, and John Staub moved to the position of President.

We encourage anyone who is interested in serving on the FOM Board of Directors to send a cover letter and a bio/resume to President@FriendsOfMalawi.org. We will keep this information on file. When vacancies arise we will contact these individuals, as well as posting notices on the website and in the Newsletter. Position descriptions have been added to the website. Two positions are open now as Matt and Katrina (Young) Grantz decided they were a bit busy following the birth of their first child.

Goal one for 2006 is to survey the entire FOM membership. The Board believes that periodically we need to review why FOM exists and where the FOM membership wants us to go. There are many options for the organization. We can facilitate networking, provide small grants, fund micro-finance lending, etc. The question is, on what do YOU want Friends Of Malawi to focus? A paper copy of the survey is included with the Newsletter. If possible, we prefer that you fill in the survey on-line. Go to www.FriendsOfMalawi.org and click on the link "Take Now!" You will be directed to our survey on SurveyMonkey.com. Once survey results are tallied, the Board will formulate a three-year plan with short and long-term goals, and steps to achieve the goals. We also are looking for volunteers to log paper surveys into the on-line system.

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR SURVEY BY MARCH 31, 2006.

The food shortage in Malawi has placed Malawi in the world news for all the wrong reasons. FOM met with Malawian Ambassador Mr. B. H. Sande to gauge how FOM could best help. We were pleased to learn about the Malawi government's effort to foster a national fundraising effort to help Malawians help Malawians instead of relying solely on foreign aid. Malawi faces significant hurdles, mainly limited infrastructure and a large portion of its population dependent on subsistence farming of maize. There is a growing realization that food diversification, such as permaculture (i.e. sustainable, nutritious gardening) is needed. People in Malawi are talking about relying less on nsima. While this doesn't mean they have changed their routines, the door has been cracked open. FOM provided \$2280 to the UN World Food Program for short-term assistance. However, FOM will continue to prioritize work on longer-term solutions: literacy, education, nutrition, and micro-enterprise development.

Tsalani Bwino,
John

F.O.M. BOARD MEMBERS

President: John Staub, 98-99: Washington, DC
Vice President: Dawn Citrin, 98-00: Washington, DC
Treasurer: Lance Cole, 93-94: Portland, OR
Secretary: Ericka Harney, Lexington, KY
Membership: Kristen George, 02-04: Baltimore, MD
Grants: Katie Reidy, 99-01: Washington, DC
Newsletter: Beth Evans, 62-64: Longmeadow, MA
Sandra Lauffer, 65-67: Washington, DC
Angela Sanders, 00-02: Macomb, IL
Sandra Lauffer also serves as a delegate to the NPCA
as the representative for Central and Southern Africa

HOW TO CONTACT F.O.M.

F.O.M. MAILING ADDRESS:

Friends Of Malawi
1850 Columbia Pike #729
Arlington, VA 22204

MEMBERSHIP:

Kristen George
kristengeorge00@yahoo.com

NEWSLETTER:

Beth Evans
Elizabeth_Evans@spfldcol.edu

GRANT APPLICATIONS:

Katie Reidy
FOMgrants@yahoo.com (Grant application forms
also available on request from this address)

IN MEMORIAM

We are sad to report that we have been informed
that the following RPCVs or FOM Members have
passed away.

Florence Miller, February, 1999.

Robert W. Kelly (Malawi III) August 21, 2005. He
taught at Fort Johnston (now Mangoche) Secondary
School.

Lawrence Newman (Malawi III) October, 2005. He
taught in Blantyre.

GRANT REPORT

The following nine grants have been awarded
since the last issue of the FOM Newsletter was
printed.

Jack Allison's musical tour to combat AIDS.
See story on page 9.

Mphizi Village in Salima District will be living
among more *Acacia polyacantha* trees (known locally
as mthethe trees), thanks to **John Nyambi** and his
village self-help committee. The local group
received \$415 from FOM in November to plant
30,000 trees. The community cleared 100 hectares of
land, composted and constructed nursery beds in
anticipation of the start of their reforestation project
that aims to reduce soil erosion into streams, provide
firewood and charcoal for fuel, discourage wood
poaching from the nearby forest reserve and educate
villagers on sustainable wood energy production.

Justin Deerwester, a volunteer at **Nkhomboli
Community Day Secondary School** in the Rumphu
District, received a grant for \$400 to purchase school
supplies, including dictionaries, mathematics text
books and scientific calculators, for the Project Pass
program that was designed to help improve students'
performance on the national secondary school exams.
Before the addition of materials, the community-
funded school had few academic supplies and five or
six students per textbook.

The **Wungwero Book Foundation** will be able to
purchase new furniture with their \$500 grant that will
benefit the **Rural Conventional Library at
Chizunga** in the Chikwawa District.

Shane McGee, a teacher at **Bilila Community
Day Secondary School** in the Ntcheu District
received \$420 last August to purchase enough desks
and chairs to seat 90 students who previously sat on
the floor. Local carpenters are making the desks. In
addition, Shane and five members and students of the
Bilila community received a grant of \$478 in January
2006, to begin a self-sustaining egg selling business.
The group will be able to purchase 100 chicks, feed
and medicine. Profits will help to provide financial
support to further studies for these students as well as
to provide an important source of cheap animal
protein to a malnourished community.

Karen Wilson and the **Mazungumika
Beekeeping Club** received a grant of \$500 to
purchase 40 new hives to increase their honey
production. This group of fifteen men and women
currently produces enough honey (*cont. p. 3*) 2

FOM BOOK PROJECT

RPCV, Shannon Brown has been shipping books to Malawi since 1999 when 3, 225 books were sent to schools and libraries. At a cost of \$6,346, over 6,000 were shipped in 2005. To date, more than 35,000 books have become valuable resources in communities all over the country.

The Book Project has received support from many Oregon and Washington schools, librarians, and individuals who donate children's books, textbooks, educational materials and tax-deductible money. Books are shipped nearly every week. Because there is no overhead for the project, 100% of donations can be used for freight costs. Freight costs are \$1.00 per pound when sent by the US Postal Service M Bag. The average box of materials weighs about 40 pounds.

If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation, make a check payable to Friends of Malawi Book Project. Send it to Shannon Brown, 7940 SW 11th Portland, OR 97219. (Tax ID 52-1557532)
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GRANT REPORT cont. from page 2

for their own families, but with the addition of the new hives, will be able to produce approximately 2,000 liters of honey, 100kg of beeswax and 1,500 kg of propolis each year. The surplus will be sold to a wholesale buyer and the profits will go directly to the families of the club members.

The **Mkanda Educational Zone** of the Mchinji District will benefit from **Elizabeth Doerr's** HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention training. Elizabeth and her colleagues received \$262 to promote HIV/AIDS education for all of the primary school teachers in the Mkanda Zone, establish anti-AIDS clubs ("EDZI Toto" clubs), and encourage teachers to go for Voluntary Testing and Counseling (VCT).

FOM contributed more than \$2,200 to the **World Food Programme** to assist with the food shortage relief effort.

We look forward to reporting the next round of projects and receiving your grant applications!

Contact Katie Reidy at FOMgrants@yahoo.com.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

On January 6, 2006, President Bush signed into law The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006. This legislation includes a provision supported by the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) that removes references to Peace Corps in the "National Call to Service" (NCS) military recruitment program. The amendment to the Defense Authorization Act to de-link Peace Corps from the NCS program was introduced by Senators Christopher Dodd (CT) and Ted Kennedy (MA) with Armed Services Chairman John Warner (VA).

By agreeing to the Senate amendment, House Armed Services Chairman Duncan Hunter helped to advance the legislation. Congressman John Kline (MN) introduced legislation to address the issue, and a bi-partisan list of 38 other House members, including RPCV Congressmen Mike Honda (CA) and Sam Farr (CA), showed support for the measure (go to the thomas.loc.gov website for the entire list).

A bi-partisan group of former Peace Corps Directors provided advice and support on this effort. The group included Carol Bellamy, Joe Blatchford, Richard Celeste, Nick Craw, Kevin O'Donnell, Mark Gearan, Donald Hess and Mark Schneider. Many thanks go to NPCA members and others who took action through letters, emails, faxes and phone calls. These actions helped to protect the safety and security of volunteer and Peace Corps' independence.

REQUEST TO CURRENT PCVs

FOM would like to feature some creative writing done by Malawians. Have your students, clients, or colleagues write 1-3 pages and email it to Elizabeth.Evans@spfldcol.edu or fax 413-748-3537. Writings may be autobiographical, totally fictional, or they may feature some custom or social situation in Malawian culture. Please refer to the poster at the computer bank at the Peace Corps Office.

SEARCHERS NEEDED

FOM would like to have one RPCV from each decade who would be willing to try to collate a list of others who served in Malawi during the same decade. Finding up-to-date addresses will help the organization and friends keep in touch. If you are interested, contact Kristen George (see FOM membership email address) to receive more information.

FAMINE GRIPPING MALAWI

The Observer has reported that there is a food crisis in Malawi and famine is worse than anticipated. Aid agencies are estimating that at least five million people will face starvation this winter. This number is nearly a million more than previous estimates and this food crisis is replicated in five other African countries.

The Malawi Ministry of Health has released data showing that hunger among its people is increasing dramatically because of severe drought, lack of irrigation and HIV/AIDS. Many report that they are eating only one meal or less a day. Rising maize prices and malnutrition will make it more likely that people will need assistance in order to survive.

Food distribution centers have been established in the south, the worst affected area, and there are large increases in the number of individuals registering for food assistance. Thousands are trying to get rations on the monthly distribution days. Prices of food usually rise from December until the March/April time of harvest. During those months, maize is scarce and expensive, so people eat their own reserves.

World Food Program (WFP) officials warned that there would be a food crisis, but even they were surprised by the scale of the problem. WFP officials say that a funding shortfall of at least \$70 million will have to be met by donors if the program is to be effective until the next harvest. Because it can take up to four months to move food from abroad to the regions needing it, it is crucial that they receive cash contributions so that food may be bought locally.

This crisis has been described as *a new type of food crisis* - one significantly different from that in Niger and West Africa. It has been labeled a *triple threat*. ***Drought has been compounded by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and by poor institutional infrastructure.*** Although 85 percent of Malawians earn a living by subsistence farming, only 20,000 of the 9.6 million hectares of agricultural land are irrigated. Of the 1.9 million adults who have HIV or AIDS many are not healthy enough to be able to plant or tend gardens for growing food.

Agriculture Minister Uladi Mussa said that without donors “hundreds of thousands of Malawians will die. We are not looking for handouts. Malawians believe you must try to help yourself before you ask anyone else and the people have contributed around 70m Malawi Kwacha to the Feed the Nation Fund, but at this stage we need help. . .”

PLUMPY'NUT

The United Nations estimates that worldwide more than 800 million people have too little to eat to meet their energy needs. Over 25 percent of children under the age of five are malnourished. To many African children, the brown paste known as ***Plumpy'nut***, has become the elixir of life. Aid agencies use it in the fight against hunger because infants can eat the sweet smelling paste – with all of the nutritional value of traditional milk formula – at home, rather than in a hospital.

Plumpy'nut was developed seven years ago and production has risen ever since. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) (Doctors Without Borders) has used Plumpy'nut sachets in Sudan's Darfur region and in Niger where many children had been living on leaves and grass after the harvests failed because of drought and locusts. In 2005, about 250,000 children were fed with Plumpy'nut – a name derived by combining plump and peanut. Spooning the brown paste into their infants' mouths, mothers say that their malnourished children can stage surprisingly fast recoveries with medical attention from MSF doctors who prescribe the food.

Hospital treatment requires lots of staff and equipment, and a nursing mother might have to stay as long as four months with her child and leave other children at home. Because Plumpy'nut can be eaten straight from the packet at home, three to five times more children can be reached. Also, the risk of illnesses being transmitted in the hospital is reduced. Now only 30 percent of malnourished children need to stay in clinics. This reduces costs and helps staff.

Traditional milk formulas need to be mixed with water, but clean water often is not available to families in crisis regions. Plumpy'nut is very easy to make. Nutriset has moved production from France and now has factories producing the product in Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Niger. The African countries receive materials and training from Nutriset and are obliged to buy the special vitamin and mineral mix that is central to Plumpy'nut. The other key ingredients such as peanut paste can be produced in country. In Malawi, about a ton of Plumpy'nut is being made each day – enough to feed 4,000 children.

The US Government has awarded a \$130,400 grant to support the alliance between Nutriset and Project Peanut Butter, a new Malawian non-governmental organization. UNICEF, the Malawi Ministry of Health, and the World Food Program support the alliance also.

DEFORESTATION

The *New York Times* has featured an article entitled “Malawi Is Burning, and Deforestation Erodes Economy.” Because of illegal logging, Malawi loses nearly 200 square miles of its forests every year. This is a deforestation rate of 2.8 percent, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Chopping down the trees causes a blight on the landscape, it dries up streams, adds to air pollution, lowers the water table and erodes the soil so that hydroelectric plants are blacked out from all of the silt going into the rivers.

Poverty is a leading cause of the deforestation. Wood and charcoal are preferred for cooking and heating fuels in Malawi. For hundreds and thousands of people living in rural areas, selling firewood and charcoal is the only means of earning money. The income from a single masuku tree brings about K2000, or about \$15.00. Mr. Juma, an illegal logger, says that he cuts about 15 trees a year.

Theoretically, the people could benefit more from saving the forests instead of clearing them. There are studies that indicate that the income from forest beehives and their honey can exceed profits from selling firewood. Mushrooms and exotic plants that grow in the woods can be used in home remedies. If it were available, cooking with electricity would be less expensive. But, only 2 percent of Malawians have access to electricity.

Between 1990 and 2000 more than a fifth of Malawi’s forests vanished. The World Bank has noted that 23 species of trees are considered endangered. In the southern region where the largest population dwells, four-fifths of the tree cover has been lost. The largest areas of untouched forest include those that protect community graveyards.

Michael Pathungo, an assistant forestry officer in the southern region said, “The rate of cutting is dwindling because there are no more forests.” However, in other parts of Malawi, the signs that charcoal makers are at work are seen as plumes of smoke ascending skyward, and along the roadsides evidence of the illegal logging is obvious in the stacks of firewood for sale.

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CORRECTION

In the previous issue of the FOM Newsletter, Bingu wa Mutharika was listed as Prime Minister. Newspapers around the world appear to alternate the use of Prime Minister and President. Because Malawi is a Republic, the correct title is President.

SUSTAINABLE FOOD CRISIS

By Stacia & Kristof Nordin

Once again the media are reporting about the annual “food crisis” in Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately this is a pattern that continues year after year, with the exception that each year it gets worse. It seems like our development and relief structures have at least succeeded in creating a *sustainable food crisis*. It seems that strategies to reverse this trend need rethinking instead of just spending more money on them—it’s like yelling the same message again, but louder, to a person who doesn’t speak your language; it won’t help, you just lose energy and confuse and possibly irritate the other person. Instead you need to learn the other person’s language.

Much to the glee of subsidized farmers who produce too much in industrialized nations, and to the companies who make synthetic fertilizers, programs continue to hand out food, seed, and synthetic fertilizer. There are thousands of people spending millions of dollars and expending massive amounts of energy and time on the *wrong things*.

People often blame the weather: Climates are changing, but floods and droughts aren’t solely the weather’s fault. Low rainfall doesn’t always cause drought nor does heavy rainfall always cause a flood. It depends on the conditions on the ground as much as how much rain falls.

Maps of rainfall in Malawi show that almost the whole of Malawi, except for the Southern tip, had normal rainfall patterns this past growing season. The actual amount of rainfall, reported as drought, was not the problem; the problem was what was done with the rain when it came. Unfortunately, the shift in agriculture and life styles has altered the environment, damaged the soil, and removed the diversity of plants and animals that used to help cope with both high and low amounts of rain. Areas that used to soak up rain and allow it to sink into the groundwater are gone. Areas are cleared of plants, trees and animals and plowed every year, or paved with roads, covered with buildings or swept and burned rock hard. When there is little rain, the soil, plants, and trees become dry resulting in drought. When there is a lot of rain, the soil can’t soak it up fast enough and the plants and trees are not there to help. The result is flooding.

Last year, our demonstration plot was a jungle of different foods, medicines, and building supplies. (cont. page 9)

JACK ALLISON SINGS TO COMBAT AIDS

RPCV Jack Allison is a medical doctor who specializes in emergency medicine. He did not think that he could write music until he was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Malawi where he is well known for playing music with a message in Malawian languages. His *Ufa wa Mtedza* is one of the most popular songs ever recorded in Chichewa and it is often played on MCB Radio One.

In 1994 the Peace Corps, USAID, and several other organizations invited Jack to head up an AIDS education prevention program. He teamed up with local musicians and produced an album of seven songs. His album "Nyimbo Za EDZI" (Songs About AIDS) raised over \$30,000 that was used to feed Malawian orphans.

In 2005, Jack was invited back and some family members were able to join him. The three main venues for the tour were Nkhata Bay, Mkanda Village (west of Lilongwe), and the Malawi Children's Village at Mangoche. Concerts drew crowds of 3,000 plus, 500, and 3,500. Shows averaged three hours in length and often included rock music, traditional music, dance troupes, drama groups and even a one-man band. *Ufa wa Mtedza* still is incredibly popular and each performance began and ended with it.

Jack also sang at a nightclub in Lilongwe and at the home of the Acting U.S. Ambassador for the annual 4th of July Celebration. Available PCVs were able to meet with Jack at the home of Peace Corps Director, Pamela Martin for a lunch with pizza.

The primary host for the tour was Ulemu Malindi, Cultural Affairs Officer for the U. S. Embassy. Other sponsors included Peace Corps/Malawi, Friends of Malawi (FOM), and Malawi Children's Village. FOM provided generous and much needed financial support.

A highlight of the trip was a chance to re-climb Mt. Kilimanjaro--this time with his son Josh along. Since returning to the United States, Jack has been working with PCV Linda Erickson in applying for a conjoint grant through Rotary International to provide hearty imported goats for milk to feed neonatal orphans and to protect a local water supply.

A personal goal for Jack is to appear on the Oprah Winfrey Show and feature his "American Heroes" single-song CD so that the proceeds can go to severely wounded and/or injured military personnel returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

BILLIONS LOST DUE TO CORRUPTION

The Chronicle newspaper (Lilongwe) has obtained a document and details of 21 cases of high level corruption and it reported that since 1999, the Malawi government lost close to K5 billion due to high-level corruption involving top government and party officials.

The document alleges that the government has not recovered K13 million in a case where Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Secretary General Joyce Banda is reported to have been awarded K26 million as part of a contract to build the Limbe Transit Depot by ADMARC in 2002, when she was its Board Member. The document also alleges that she kept moneys awarded to Kambe Building Contractors, which she owns, to construct a fence at the Limbe Transit Depot.

Aleke K. Banda, former Agriculture Minister, is implicated in a scam involving fertilizer transactions with Smallholder Farmers Fertilizer Revolving Fund of Malawi Starter Pack Program. He also is accused of obtaining goods from Farmers World under false pretenses.

DPP Second Deputy Vice President Khumbo Kachali and some of the board members of the National Roads Authority are implicated in a K11,500,000 scam.

Former Head of State, Bakili Muluzi is implicated in the purchase of a house in South Africa from Air Malawi and that he received K100 million to pardon Shabir Suleman who was convicted for bribing a Malawi High Court Judge.

The civil society has said that this whole situation is a mockery to the current situation when the government is begging for food relief to save 5 million citizens from starving to death.

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PLEASE SEND INFORMATION AND ARTICLES FOR FUTURE ISSUES TO:

Elizabeth_ Evans@spfldcol.edu pr Fax to (413) 748-3537 or mail to E. Evans
Judd Gymnasia, Springfield College
263 Alden Street
Springfield, MA USA 01109

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Malawi Experience.....Cont. from page 5
 “traditional” social organization: the moral, political and economic norms. Rights and obligations are ascribed in respect to who you are, and those who are your ancestors and your descendants. The traditional Arab saying expresses the idea well: “Me and my brother against my cousin; me and my cousin against my village; me and my village against a stranger.” While this is scarcely the stuff of western industrial society, it provides a structure for traditional social organization that brings order to the lives of millions of people all over the earth.

At the same time, traditional norms are one important factor in the tragic state of affairs we find in Malawi today. Democratic governmental institutions are compromised by decisions that reflect clan and tribe rather than substantive policy issues. We all are familiar with the result of elections based on tribal factions where the winner takes all and continues to hold onto it indefinitely. With virtually all members of governmental administrations limited to the same affinity group, opposition is hopeless and government, absent competition, becomes synonymous with corruption. It does not take long to develop the kleptocracies. Then a crazy quilt of aid programs intervenes to prevent the worst consequences of poverty and disease and in so doing provides a safety net for politicians who are able to evade their responsibility to their constituents. There is no accountability.

Economic markets are compromised by decisions based on family and traditional obligations as opposed to economic value, that is costs and benefits. Capital formation in traditional societies is all but impossible. Further, oppressive regulations strangle attempts at small business while marketing boards for farm products pay subsistence prices assuring the indefinite continuation of the grinding poverty that characterizes far too much of Africa and especially Malawi.

So, after all, is American democracy exportable? In a sense the obvious answer is yes; elections are held and parliaments sit. But beyond that, to expect political and economic outcomes similar to those that result from western democracies is to be doomed to disappointment. To yield the results of democracy that are valued in the West, the people must agree to cultural secularization; confronted by a conflict between their traditional obligations and their state, they might choose their state. That is the definition of nation building. However, even in the US this is not a clear-cut choice for all of our citizens. For

people living in traditional societies, it requires a truly heroic decision and one that cannot be forced by outsiders. It must come from within the society, and it requires formation of a social contract that restructures the most fundamental family and religious values to produce a civic culture.

The President, in his recent statement on strategy in Iraq, indicated that one of the challenges is “Building political movements based on issues and platforms, instead of identity.” He certainly has identified the problem, but if what I learned from my Malawi experience has any validity, we are as far from figuring out how to induce those values as we were in 1962. However, I am convinced of one thing and that is that when democracy finally arrives, and I believe it will, it will be because the people of Malawi demand it and refuse to permit the country to be governed without them.

Sustainable Food.....Cont. from page 6
 We spent less time, money and energy and had abundant harvests while all the pieces of land around us suffered drought. What was the difference? The solutions are to (1) take care of the soil and (2) create systems that can withstand the natural pattern of weather.

Key Concepts:

- * Conserve soil by covering it with dead or live organic matter and reduce disturbance to the soil from digging or plowing;
- *Feed the soil by having a wide variety of plants, trees, animals & insects living on it and then returning them to the soil at the end of their lives;
- *Avoid any synthetic fertilizers, poisons or chemicals that will disturb living things in the soil;
- *Choose a wide variety of plants, trees and animals that are appropriate to weather patterns in the area and that provide a wide variety of useful products (foods, medicines, clothing, etc.)
- *Plant a variety of useful, rather than ornamental trees, along roadsides;
- *Create road designs that harvest water along the edges instead of pushing it downhill where it erodes as it goes;
- *Plant parks full of useful species where people can pick fruits as they enjoy the park;
- *Harvest all organic waste from markets/restaurants;
- *Fill agricultural fields with many different species and intercrop with trees and other permanent species. The ideas are endless and feasible! If you are tired of the sustainable food crisis, join in redesigning growing/planting for health and wealth!