

Neill Schaller joins IAA as Associate Director; Receives Professional of the Year Award

Neill Schaller, formerly Program Director of the Low-Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) research and education program at the USDA, was named Associate Director of the Institute for Alternative Agriculture in September, 1990. "Neill's extensive background in alternative agriculture issues from policy, research, and educational perspectives will be enormously helpful in moving the Institute's expanding agenda forward," said IAA Executive Director Dr. Garth Youngberg. Prior to his administration of the LISA program, Dr. Schaller had been Assistant Director of Natural Resource Economics Research at the USDA Economic Research Service, Special Assistant to the Secretary for Consumer Affairs, and Administrator of the Extension Service. Schaller holds an A.B. degree in sociology from Princeton University and a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from the University of California-Berkeley.

In September, Dr. Schaller was notified that he had been selected to receive

the Professional of the Year Award from the Organization of Professional Employees of the Department of Agriculture (OPEDA). This recognition stemmed from "the quality of his work and interest in agriculture," according to Otis Thompson, Executive Director of the 7,500-member organization. The award was presented during a three-day annual OPEDA meeting in October. "This award is our organization's highest honor," said Mr. Thompson.

Ward Sinclair receives top food columnist award

IAA Board Member, Ward Sinclair, has been named top food columnist by the Newspaper Food Editors and Writers Association. Sinclair, who operates an organic vegetable and fruit farm near Dott, PA, contributes a monthly column to the *Washington Post* called "Truck Patch." The witty and informative column focuses on the difficulties and rewards of growing and marketing a wide array of fresh produce on some 15 cultivated acres. Sinclair was the agricultural reporter at the *Post* for nearly 7 years. He and his partner, Cass Peterson, took up farming on a full-time basis in 1988.

Johnson, Adams, Vidaver named to IAA Board

At their annual mid-year meeting on September 8 in Moscow, Idaho, IAA's Board of Directors elected three new members. Paul W. Johnson operates a dairy, sheep, and Christmas tree farm near Decorah, Iowa. Since 1984 he has served in the Iowa General Assembly where he was major author of the historic 1987 Iowa Groundwater Protection Act. Dr. Eugene W. Adams is Professor Emeritus, International Education and Extension, Tuskegee University. Specializing in veterinary education and research, Dr. Adams has

for two decades provided leadership in international agricultural development in a number of African and Caribbean countries. Dr. Anne K. Vidaver is Head of the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Nebraska. Her research and administrative interests include participation and leadership in interdisciplinary science, especially as related to managed ecosystems. The three will be formally seated on the Board at its annual meeting in March, 1991.

Mr. Jay Harris of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, is slated to complete his Board tenure in March, 1991. He was presented with a certificate of appreciation for his long and active service. Mr. Harris served on the Executive Committee for three years.

In addition to its regular business, the Board, along with the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at Washington State University, co-hosted a Friday evening reception at the Lewis Alumni Centre on the University's campus.

Highest conservation honor goes to Norm Berg

Norm Berg, who serves on the IAA's President's Council, last summer received the Hugh Hammond Bennett Award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society. It is the Society's most prestigious award, given to no more than one individual annually in recognition of distinguished service and international accomplishments in land and water conservation.

Berg, who serves part time as the Society's representative in Washington, DC, was recognized for his achievements in furthering a conservation ethic on both national and international levels for nearly 50 years. Berg's long and distinguished career included several years as Chief of USDA's Soil Conservation Service. 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR INVITED

The AJAA welcomes letters, short or long, commenting on articles in this journal or sharing ideas likely to be of interest to other AJAA readers. Since our space is limited, we do reserve the right not to publish all letters or, at times, to publish only excerpts from them. To take part in this exchange of ideas, write to: Editor, AJAA, 9200 Edmonston Road, Suite 117, Greenbelt, MD 20770.

University of California researcher summarized research on the topic as follows:

As farm size and absentee ownership increase, we have found depressed median family incomes, high levels of poverty, low education levels, social and economic inequality between ethnic groups, etc., associated with land and capital concentration in agriculture....Communities that are surrounded by farms that are larger than can be operated by a family unit have a bi-modal income distribution with a few wealthy elites, a majority of poor laborers, and virtually no middle class. The absence of a middle class at the community level has a serious negative effect on both the quality and quantity of social and commercial services, public education, local governments, etc. (MacCannell, 1983).

Likewise, Nebraska research reveals a direct correlation between concentration in agriculture and the social and economic decline of agriculturally based communities (Swanson, 1980).

The challenge to sustainable agriculture is to develop farming systems that address these social concerns, as they address environmental quality. Just as sustainable agriculture seeks to address problems of production holistically, we will be most effective if we address social and environmental goals simultaneously and holistically. A piecemeal approach may result in social and environmental initiatives that are at odds with each other. For example, commodity programs aimed at supporting farm income now undermine sustainable production systems. Such conflict is not inevitable, but rather is a result of seeking piecemeal solutions to intertwined problems. We can choose to develop and shape sustainable systems to enhance family farming and the rural environment, or we can ignore the former and blindly develop systems that put the two in opposition.

Following are some approaches for incorporating social sustainability in sustainable farming systems by consciously shaping them to provide increased opportunities for moderate-sized owner-operated farms:

--Reduce purchases of both chemical and nonchemical inputs from off the farm, rather than replacing petrochemicals with environmentally benign alternative products. Reducing input purchases reduces capital barriers to young people getting started in farming. It keeps a larger share of the farm dollar on the farm to provide income to farm operators. Finally, it reduces the advantage that large farms gain over moderate-sized farms through volume discounts, and thereby helps level the playing field. Volume discounts provide a significant competitive advantage to large farms (Knutson, 1987).

--Increase opportunities to apply and earn a return on *skilled* labor and intensive management in the field and barn. Skilled and highly motivated labor and hands-on management are the principal strengths and competitive advantages of family farmers. Strategies are needed for using them to reduce input costs and capital requirements and increase returns. However, systems dependent on large amounts of *unskilled* labor beyond that which can be provided by farm families (for example, extensive hand weeding of field crops) may instead lend themselves to a class-structured agriculture with armies of poorly paid farm

workers. Likewise, production systems that require high degrees of organizational management easily separable from provision of labor and performed in the office, such as acquiring assets, managing investments, and risk management, also lend themselves well to a class-structured agriculture.

--Develop farming systems that can be applied at least as economically on moderate-sized farms as on large operations. Typically, farming systems that require large fixed investments of capital, such as total confinement livestock systems, are most economical on a large scale because of the need to spread high fixed costs over many units of production. However, moderate investment systems can often be as profitable on a moderate scale.

The environment and family farming need not be placed in competition. Farming systems can be designed to support farm opportunities, equity, and rural community vitality as they sustain our resource endowment. However, that will not happen unless we make it happen. We must consciously set research priorities and design farming systems that advance the public interest in its social as well as its environmental aspects. In short, sustainable agriculture must take an holistic approach to issues of social justice and environment, just as it takes an holistic approach to problems on the farm.

References

1. Knutson, Ronald. 1987. Why the Mid-Size Family Farm is Dying. Department of Economics, Texas A & M University.
2. MacCannell, Dean. 1983. Agribusiness and the Small Community. Background paper to Technology, Public Policy and the Changing Structure of American Agriculture. Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress, Washington, DC.
3. Swanson, Larry D. 1980. A Study in Socioeconomic Development: Changing Farm Structure and Rural Community Decline in the Context of the Technological Transformation of American Agriculture. Ph.D. diss., Department of Economics, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Editor's note for future AJAA authors

We would like to call your attention to an addition to the "Guide for Authors" on the inside back cover of this issue, in which we recommend the best kinds of sources to cite. Where there is a choice, we ask that you give preference to readily available materials (books, journal articles, or documents from institutions with well-established publication programs, such as experiment station bulletins). Less desirable is the so-called "fugitive literature," such as texts of conference presentations, internal working papers, progress reports, and other unpublished or informally published material.

The reason for this recommendation is that a citation not only gives credit for other people's work, but should also allow the reader to pursue the matter in more depth. The latter function is fulfilled only if the material you cite is reasonably available, either at a library or from the source. Remember, too, that "available" means not just immediately, but for as many years into the future as you would like your article to be read. It is frustrating if the reader is not able to get hold of a key reference; by citing available sources, you will greatly enhance the value of your article.