



# MFSI News

## Ke-hvse Mulberry May 2007

### Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative

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A majority of the Board, Advisory Committee, Ex Officio and staff are Muscogee (Creek) citizens.

### Community Food Assessments are Progressing

MFSI has begun the process of holding meetings to survey the food-related issues, concerns, needs and resources present in MCN communities. Participation has been good at the Wilson, Cromwell, Sapulpa, Muskogee and Koweta Creek Indian communities, to date.

Here are some of the more notable results thus far:

- Over 97% of respondents stated they would buy produce from a Farmer's Market, if one existed in their local community;
- Over 93% of the respondents stated they would prefer to eat locally grown foods;
- Over 93% stated they are concerned about chemicals (herbicides, pesticides and fungicides) in food;
- Over 93% stated they are concerned about food contamination (e-coli, salmonella, etc).
- Over 70% stated they would participate in a food coop, though most citizens in northeastern Oklahoma have little experience with a food coop;

- Only 44% of the respondents actually have a family garden; but 72% said they would garden if a tilling service was provided.;
- Almost 80% of the respondents stated they would help in a community garden if one was started in their community.

MFSI staff continue to schedule the remaining tribal community boards on the type of assessment they wish to undertake. The dialog, thus far, has been interesting with Mvskoke citizens and their neighbors. To hear local concerns and interests related to food, and to hear the knowledge that still exists pertaining to growing food and preserving it, has been inspiring.

MFSI will travel to the following Creek Indian Community Centers during the month of May:

May 8th-Holdenville

May 9th Twin Hills

May 21st-Okemah

May 24th-Eufaula

MFSI received a sizeable seed donation from Heifer International at the end of last year. Survey respondents receive free seeds for their participation in the assessment.

## May Gardening Tips

The time to **think** about gardening has past, and now the growing season is upon us. Hopefully, your seeds, bulbs and starts are in the ground. Perhaps you have been to one of the MFSI Community Assessment Survey meetings and picked up a good quantity of seeds, courtesy of a donation from Heifer International. Or, maybe you saved the seeds from a tan field pumpkin you purchased from us last fall.

Mvskoke people (living within the boundaries of MCN) fall in Plant Zone 7. The guide below is only a guide, but is offered here for several reasons. First, many of you suffered some plant loss last month due to back-to-back freezes on April 7th and 8th, Easter Sunday weekend. Maybe you are considering a second planting of items. Secondly, some of our elders assure us that they can be late on many varieties of vegetables and still have a good harvest. Lastly, many of the warm season vegetables listed here can be planted through June. Here are some excerpts from the OSU Extension Services planting guide.

Vegetable	Planting Time	Seed Planting Depth	Spacing between seeds	Spacing Between rows	Days to Harvest
Bean (lima)	Apr. 15-30	1"	6"	2-3'	90-120
Bean (green or wax)	Apr. 10-30	1"	4"	1.5'	50-60
Bean (pole)	Apr. 10-30	1"	8"-12"	3'	60-90
Cantaloupe	May 1-20	1/2 "	2-3'	3-5'	80-100
Cucumber	Apr 10-30	1/2"	2-3'	3-5'	50-70
Eggplant	Apr 10-30		1.5'	3'	80-90
Okra	Apr 10-30	1"	1.5'	2-3'	60-70
Pepper	Apr 10-30		2'	3'	90-110
Pumpkin	Apr 10-30	1"	3-4'	5'	90-120
Southern Pea	May 1-June 10	1"	4"	3'	85-100
Squash (summer)	Apr 10-30	1"	3'	4'	40-60
Squash (winter)	May 15-June 15	1"	4'	5'	110-125
Sweet corn	Mar 15-Apr 15	1"	1.5'	3'	80-100
Sweet Potato	May 1-June 10		1'	3'	100-120
Tomato	Apr 10-30		2-3'	4'	70-90
Watermelon	May 10-20	1"	5-8'	5-8'	90-120

## Indigenous Food of the Month: Mulberry by Vicky Karhu

When Hernando De Soto and his small army of Spaniards marched through the southeastern United States in the early 1540's, they often encountered large groves of Mulberry trees, particularly in the river valleys of what is now East Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Western North Carolina. His chroniclers describe how the Indians spared these and other fruit-bearing trees from being cut for use as firewood and construction material. On their way to the town of Chiaha, near a town called Canasoga, the expedition was greeted by a group of twenty Indians who brought them baskets of mulberries as a gift, "which was perhaps the only food they had in abundance in this spring season." A large Creek still named Conasauga flows through the Tennessee River Valley near the town of Etowah, Tennessee. It is easy to imagine the landscape in this beautiful valley setting with the mulberry trees dripping with fruit in the spring sun. The naturalist, William Bartram, also mentions mulberries as a favorite fruit of the Mvskoke people he visited in the late 1700's.

The "red" or "black" mulberry trees are a hardy native of the Southeastern United States that thrive in moist, fertile soils, but can also grow in poor soils, as long there is moisture. The long, blackberry-like fruits appear from late spring to early summer and are exceptionally sweet, making them a favorite for baking and eating raw. Birds and squirrels love these berries, too, and can clean a tree off before humans get a chance to harvest the fruit. Mulberries are harvested by placing a blanket on the ground beneath the tree and shaking the branches; they are highly perishable making them inappropriate for shipping and retail sales; consequently, mulberries are largely ignored as a commercial agricultural crop. Dried leaves of the White Mulberry tree, native to Asia, are known for their medicinal value in China and Japan and are used to help regulate blood sugar and for their beneficial effect on red blood cell lipids.

Studies in Japan and India have linked mulberry leaf extract to increased HDL (good) cholesterol, decreased LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides. Besides being a delicious and, possibly medicinal, food; the mulberry tree was valuable to the indigenous peoples of the eastern United States as a source of fiber for textile production.

The following description comes from La Page Du Pratz, *History of Louisiana, 1774*:

*Many of the women wear cloaks of the bark of the mulberry-tree, or of the feathers of swans, turkies, or India ducks. The bark they take from young mulberry shoots that rise from the roots of trees that have been cut down; after it is dried in the sun they beat it to make all the woody part fall off, and they give the threads that remain a second beating, after which they bleach them by exposing them to the dew. When they are well whitened they spin them about the coarseness of pack-thread, and weave them in the following manner: they plant two stakes in the ground about a yard and a half asunder, and having stretched a cord from the one to the other, they fasten their threads of bark double to this cord, and then interweave them in a curious manner into a cloak of about a yard square with a wrought border round the edges. When the girls reach the age of eight or nine years they are clothed from the waist to the ankles with a fringe of threads of mulberry bark, fastened to a band 033 which is attached below the abdomen; there is also another band above the abdomen which meets the first at the back; between the two the body is covered in front by a network which is held there by the bands, and at the back there are merely two large cords, each having a tassel.*

The fiber has been used in Asia to produce paper for centuries and is now used for this purpose all over the world. The Asia White Mulberry is the host plant for the famous silkworms. The durable, yet soft mulberry wood is used for fence posts, farm implements, furniture and caskets.

Red Mulberry trees grow throughout Oklahoma. Many people know where these trees are and keep an eye on them so that they can harvest the sweet fruits. Many local trees were hit by freezes in April. OSU extension agent, Doug Maxey, reported in the *Okmulgee Daily Times* that they should recover and bear fruit this year.

**rGBH, Its What's for Breakfast (and lunch and dinner)**

BST is bovine somatotropin, and is also called BGH, short for **bovine growth hormone**. It is a protein that occurs naturally in animals; in cows, it is produced in a cow's pituitary gland, and increases milk production .

What is **recombinant** bovine somatotropin? rBST, or rGBH, recombinant bovine growth hormone, is an artificial hormone that increases milk productivity in cows above and beyond natural levels. The Food and Drug Administration approved rGBH for use in the dairy industry in 1994. rGBH, typically, comes in the form of a Monsanto product called Prosilac, which can boost a dairy cow's milk production 10-15%.

Like Aspartame and other food additives that have had a controversial entre into the American food supply, rGBH has been deemed safe by the FDA. Its 1994 approval was partly dependent on manufacturer studies and claims of safety. Monsanto states, at [monsanto.com](http://monsanto.com), that over 50 countries have deemed rGBH to be safe. However, based on early concerns over its use, Canada, Japan and the European Union have banned import of American milk for years.

What are some of the concerns over hormone-laden dairy products? Some of the concerns center around side effects that result in dairy cows, and, also, on substances that it creates in the human food supply.

Insulin growth factor 1, or IGF-1, is a natural substance found throughout the human body. rGBH milk contains **elevated** levels of synthetic IGF-1. Though Monsanto says that IGF-1 does not stay in the human body long enough to cause problems, rGBH critics say the synthetic version of IGF-1 survives milk pasteurization and remains in human digestive tracts longer than the natural version. IGF-1 has been shown by the US National Institutes of Health (beginning in the 1990's) to have a link to various forms of cancer, particularly bladder cancer.

Mastitis is an infection/inflammation that affects cow udders. The use of rGBH in dairy cows increases the frequency and severity of mastitis. To fight the

increased cases of mastitis in dairy cows receiving rGBH, dairy farmers must resort to increased use of antibiotics. Antibiotic residues making it into American dairy products has been rare, though an obvious risk for consumers with antibiotic allergies.

An unfortunate by-product of mastitis is an increase in the pus content of dairy products, especially milk. A cow's immune system, in fighting mastitis, creates more bacteria-fighting **somatic** cells. The USDA measures pus levels with the more tasteful phrase "somatic cell count." SCC levels that rise above 750,000 cells per milliliter of milk are considered illegal under USDA rules, where levels above 400,000 are illegal in countries that ban American milk. High SCC levels can make milk and dairy products taste and smell objectionable, though they are not known to constitute a direct health threat to the public.

In Florida, Publix Super Markets, Inc., has announced that its private label milk will go rGBH-free. This decision went into effect on May 1st. Publix is an employee-owned, Fortune 500 company; it has stated that it wants hormone free milk products due to consumer satisfaction and health concerns. Starbucks, the national coffee chain, enacted a similar ban earlier this year.

As in past Nutritional News articles, we don't want to end introduction of a topic without offering some positive alternatives. Oklahoma residents have alternatives to the rbgh-milk appearing on our grocery shelves. If you live within driving distance of Akins in Oklahoma City, or Akins and Wild Oats in Tulsa, these stores feature a selection of rGBH-free dairy products. Braum's also offers hormone-free milk products. Finally, many Americans substitute soy or rice milk in their family meals to avoid cow's milk altogether.

## Scholarship for Permaculture Course

Each summer students from around the hemisphere gather in Santa Fe, New Mexico to learn ways of creating sustainable relationships among humans, plants, animals and the earth. This concept is known as "Permaculture" and has always been a way of life for Native American peoples. The Traditional Native American Farmers' Association (TNAFA) offers a Permaculture Course each summer that provides students with hands-on instruction and the opportunity to earn certification as a Permaculture expert.

Under a special agreement with TNAFA, MFSI is offering two scholarships for the 2007 Permaculture Course, from July 15<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. Course topics include: gardening, nutrition, habitat restoration, solar design, water conservation, seed saving, food preservation and others. Students are taught hands-on by farmers and community leaders who share expertise in skills and techniques to lead a sustainable life. MFSI will assist two students in exchange for a volunteer commitment to share their new knowledge in Mvskoke communities. Tuition is \$950 for the course and includes lodging and noon meals. Sponsored students only need to pay for their transportation to and from Santa Fe and for evening and week-end meals, gifts, etc (about \$200 each). Permaculture students generally go in together to buy groceries and prepare evening meals in the on-site kitchen. They will be guests of the Tesuque Pueblo and will travel to surrounding farms and homes at nearby pueblos for demonstration classes. Registration is open to all ages, but students should be physically fit to participate in the gardening activities.

If interested in this training, call MFSI at 918-756-5915 for an application. Applicants will write a statement on why they wish to attend and how they will be able to use their knowledge for the benefit of their community. This offer is extended to all interested people, regardless of tribal affiliation. Applications are due Friday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, with scholarship recipients being notified by Friday, June 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **MFSI On the Move**

MFSI staff and leadership took news of our work to regional and national audiences this spring:

January- Vicky Richard, Donna, June, Ben and Rebecca attended the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group conference in Louisville, KY. We made a special presentation about MFSI to the leadership of USDA's Community Food Project program and SSAWG. Over three days, we each went to different workshops, collecting a broad range of information. We met nightly to review the day's work and held two Board meetings while there. We also met with other Oklahoma groups in a state meeting.

February - Met with Heifer International's southwest field coordinator to initiate becoming an HI project. Vicky and Richard attended a Food Policy Council meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. They made a presentation to Nashville-area Mvskoke citizens, hosted in the home of tribal member Melba Eads.

March - Vicky attended a Project Directors' meeting in Washington, D.C., for USDA Community Food Projects programs. MFSI was one of four planning projects chosen to be on a panel and discuss their work. Richard attended a Food Sector Opportunities class in Taos, New Mexico; the class focused on NM requirements to operate a commercial kitchen/cannery. Vicky, Richard and June attended an Oklahoma Food Policy Council meeting in Oklahoma City to present a report on MFSI's work.

April - Vicky and Richard attended the Kellogg Foundation's Food and Society Conference in Traverse City, MI. We made a presentation about MFSI's work to Diversifying Leadership for Sustainable Food Policy Change grantees assembled by the Jesse Smith Noyes Foundation in partnership with Kellogg. This event expanded our networking to include national projects working on food security issues.

