

*Please scroll down for page one  
of the Winter 2003 “Garden Companion”  
(BfR’s newsletter).*



# The Garden Companion

(Biointensive for Russia's newsletter)

Vol. 7, No. 1

Winter 2003

## CULTURE/ECO-AG TOUR, JUL-AUG 2002

Biointensive for Russia's (BfR's) July-August 2002 seminars in Russia were the first to be taught by Steve Moore, a certified GROW BIOINTENSIVE basic-level teacher and successful commercial Biointensive (BI) farmer from Pennsylvania. The 5-day seminar was held by the Educational Methods Center (EMC) in Novo-Sin'kovo near Moscow. Steve also taught a one-day seminar on passive solar greenhouse design at the EMC, as well as one-day seminars on both BI and greenhouse design at a Ministry of Agriculture state farm college in Novgorod and at the "Alive Earth" Young Naturalist teaching center in St. Petersburg. Steve's evolution from horse-drawn plowman to Biointensive mini-farmer, and from using fossil fuels to solar to heat his greenhouse, enabled him to be an outstanding presenter on both seminar topics.

During the two-week main tour, ecotourists John Bartz, Abby Youngblood, Steve Moore, and I toured museums and magnificent architectural sites and attended musical and ballet performances in Moscow, Suzdal, Sergiev Posad, Abramtsevo, Novgorod, and St. Petersburg. Later, Abby Youngblood, Elena Gogoleva from San Francisco, Abby's Belarusian friend Kseniya, and I spent three days visiting the Obruch family at Nevo-Ecoville in Karelia, four hours drive north from St. Petersburg. Andrei and Elena Obruch and Andrei's mother Rimma, with four natural and three adopted children, live in close harmony with nature. They grow much of the family food and all of their honey, which they trade with their neighbors. They were excited to meet me, as the Russian translation of *How to Grow More Vegetables* strongly influenced their gardening practices, as also did books on Permaculture and Fukuoka culture. I was also fortunate to visit old friends and BfR colleagues Volodya Shestakov, Natasha Krestiankina, and Albina Kochegina, and their families at their dachas in Karelia and near St. Petersburg.

The workshop tour, including all seminar and travel costs, was funded by small grants of \$200-\$1200 from the ecotourists, the Crail-Johnson Foundation, Andrew Crowley, John Vesecky, Shoshana Billik, and Dr. Gersh Yadukh, as well as by many smaller BfR member donations.

*Continued on page 3*

### What's Inside:

- **Donations, grant, future eco-ag tour . . . 2**
- ***Ekologicheskii ogorod* to be published . . . 2**
- **Upcoming Events . . . . . 4**

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Now for some good news to contrast with that filtering back on the massive military buildup in the Persian Gulf:

We are currently attempting to complete editing/ layout/printing arrangements for the Russian translation of *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden* by John Jeavons and Carol Cox, just as we greet Irina Kim from Uzbekistan and Ludmila Zhirina from Russia, to participate in the Eco-Farm Conference at Asilomar, Jan. 22-25, about which more in the article below. Various events are planned for the four- to five-week visits, many of which you're invited to join, especially if your membership is current! (See "Upcoming Events" on page 4.)

You're also welcome to get in touch if you'd care to help organize an event, serve as driver, coordinate an outing, host a gathering, etc., and live close enough to Palo Alto to help out in this way! Irina and Ludmila both speak English, in varying degrees. Translators and editors should also volunteer! Irina arrived Jan. 15 and will stay until Feb. 12; Ludmila's visit will last from Jan. 17 until approximately Feb. 25.

Hoping to see you at one or more of our activities!

*Carol Vesecky*

## LUDMILA ZHIRINA AND IRINA KIM VISIT

Even as this newsletter is being put together, Irina Kim (in center of photo at top left, taken in Novgorod last July) and

Ludmila Zhirina (at left in photo to right, snapped in Novo-Sin'kovo) are arriving from Chirchik, Uzbekistan and Bryansk, Russia, respectively. The main



purpose of their visit is to conduct a short workshop, entitled "Healing the Earth: Central Asian and Russian Food Security Projects" at the Eco-Farm Conference at Asilomar (near Monterey), January 22-25. Our participation was arranged by Kate Stafford, an Eco-Farm board member who is deeply impressed by Irina's and Ludmila's work. Please visit the site <http://www.eco-farm.org> if interested in learning more about the topics that will be discussed at the conference.

Irina, through the Ecopolis project she founded, has taught the basics of Biointensive *Cont'd on page 4*

## DONATIONS NEEDED, POTENTIAL GRANT, ECO-AG TOUR POSSIBILITY, STAY IN TOUCH!

As ever, we must appeal to our supporters for funds to enable many of our plans to be carried out. Funding Ludmila Zhirina's and Irina Kim's airfares has plunged BfR "in the red" and we're hoping you'll help us cover their basic expenses of \$1600 for air fares and medical insurance. We're also planning to bring Ludmila's co-director at Viola, Igor Prokofiev, at the end of February for a 3-day workshop in Willits, price tag roughly \$1000 for airfare, visas, and medical insurance.

These healthy sums are basically "seed money" – a worthwhile investment toward the grant work we're planning together in the Russian Far East (RFE). Inspired by long-time supporter Anya Kucharyov, we are in the beginning stages of co-authoring a proposal to the Seattle-based, USAID-funded Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation (FRAEC) with the NGO Viola and three or four NGOs and research institutes in the Russian Far East (RFE) cooperating with Ecology Action as the American non-profit partner.

The proposal, which can be for \$100,000 of funding, plus \$25,000 in matching grants and in-kind contributions, is expected to be due in late spring, 2003. We envisage the following grant activities: (1) several Biointensive – or possibly "Grow Biointensive" – workshops to be taught in various locations in the RFE by Irina Zhirina, Igor Proko-

fiev, Irina Kim, and Sasha Avrorin, (2) at least one "Grow Biointensive" tour offering workshops taught by Steve Moore or another Ecology Action-certified American "Grow Biointensive" presenter, (3) some translation and printing of Ecology Action materials, (4) dissemination of Russian translations of Ecology Action books, and (5) conferences leading to the establishment of an organic farming association in the RFE.

During the grant year, expected to be from summer 2003 to summer 2004, we also hope to present a workshop in European Russia – possibly in Rostov-on-Don in the south, and one in Central Asia, which could follow on to a workshop in the Russian Far East. Those of you interested in our "Culture/Eco-Ag Tours" will be invited to join us on at least one of the workshop tours.

The easiest way to stay up to date on all these possibilities is via e-mail, so be sure to sign up for the BfR list, if you haven't already! Messages are sporadic, but more frequent than these occasional paper newsletters. We'll also try to keep the Web site updated, using new software Berta is planning for it.

Another option is to invite me (Carol) to come give a slide show to your group, something I always enjoy doing, as it gives me a chance to relive some of the wonderful experiences I've had over the past 10 years of this project. Write or call Carol Vesecky at <cvesecky@igc.org> or 650 856-9751.

## *Ekologicheskii ogorod* to be published this winter!

After several years of inching toward this goal, we expect at long last to have the Russian translation of *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden* by John Jeavons and Carol Cox (as *Ekologicheskii ogorod*, "The Ecological Garden"), printed in Russia in the coming weeks. Formerly titled *Lazy Bed Gardening*, this book has been revised to include the latest information on "Grow Biointensive" techniques. It is an important component of Ecology Action's teaching program, emphasizing crop combinations that can help a gardener to maintain sustainable soil fertility without inputs from outside the garden plot.

The translation of the first book was made in 1997 by Elena Kotikova in Moscow. Since then Alla Krasnykh, Yury Azovtsev, Ninel Kushchenko, Marina Dadayan, and Aleksandr Avrorin have worked on its editing and on bringing the translation up to date. Yury Azovtsev has

Biointensive for Russia is a project based in Palo Alto and supported by Ecology Action. Founded in 1993 with the aid of LO\*OP Center, Inc. to help promote Biointensive minifarming in the former Soviet Union, its current goals include a two-way sharing of information on ecologically sound lifestyles. Carol Vesecky is director; our new Web master is Berta Pires. The mailing of this issue of the *Companion* was made possible by member contributions. This issue of the *Garden Companion* was edited by Carol Vesecky and Jane Chai. Please visit <http://biointensiveforrussia.igc.org> for more info.

computer typeset the book in St. Petersburg, sending PDF files to Carol Vesecky for final checking here in Palo Alto.

Funded by Ecology Action, Evgeny Shmelev of the Educational Methods Center (EMC) of the Russian Ministry of Agriculture in Novo-Sin'kovo (near Moscow) plans to print 300 copies of *Ekologicheskii ogorod* as soon as we send him our PDF files. We've asked him to send copies to our network as well as to the ag college instructors who attended the workshop taught by Steve Moore at the EMC in July 2002.

After a commercial edition has been published and with proper funding, we hope eventually to work with the EMC in Novo-Sin'kovo and the NGO Viola in Bryansk to distribute copies to NGOs and schools in the 85 administrative divisions of Russia, to which Viola has already been sending its curriculum materials (at their own expense and with the aid of \$600 from BfR), as well as all 289 colleges in the Ministry of Agriculture network.

As Ludmila Zhirina has written, "Russia needs Biointensive!!!" Please be generous with your donations, to enable us to get this important book into the hands of more ag teachers, so that they in turn can pass on the life-giving, resource-conserving concepts to the next generation of students.

**Culture/Eco-Ag Tour, continued from page 1**

The participants in the main workshop in Novo-Sin'kovo were drawn from Russian Ministry of Agriculture colleges in 16 provincial towns in as many *oblasts* of Western Russia. Our own network in the FSU was also well represented by Irina Kim of Chirchik and Bakhtiyar Jollibekov of Nukus, who flew in from Uzbekistan; Vera Korsakova, who rode the trans-Siberian railway from Novosibirsk; and three participants from the NGO Viola in Bryansk: Director Ludmila Zhirina, school principal Oleg Zavarzin, and schoolteacher Natalya Koryagina. Vladislav Terentyev of the Kitez Children's Community in west-central Russia also participated. Visiting the workshop for short periods were two journalists from the Rodale-sponsored organic gardening/ farming magazine in Moscow, an agronomist from Kamyshin (near Volgograd), and ecodesign/BI presenter Aleksandr Avrorin, who recently moved to Moscow to join his wife Larissa. (She has been living and working there already for a year.)

Steve Moore was a big hit with the participants, who adopted him as an honorary Russian, although much of his heritage is Swedish. His lectures were clear and easy to understand, especially as superbly interpreted by Nailya Minazhetdinova and Paul Voytinsky, and illustrated well by his slides. The participants were extremely attentive and asked good questions. Camaraderie was further inspired by a wonderful farewell evening, locally organized with live music, party games, and contests. Steve gamely stayed up late more than once to enjoy the ag college teachers harmonizing in Russian folk song, then rose in time to hold forth at the 8:30 daily morning workshop opening.

One evening was devoted to reports by our network of experienced GB practitioners on their experiments and teaching experiences. Irina Kim talked about the need for public environmental education; her work over 5 years teaching BI in remote Uzbek nature reserves; and the drastic climate change in Uzbekistan. Dr. Bakhtiyar Jollibekov described the saline soils in Karakalpakstan and the problem of the shrinking Aral Sea, which now contains 60 grams per liter of mineral salts (six times the pre-1960 level), where fish can no longer survive. Dr. Ludmila Zhirina discussed the situation in the Bryansk oblast, 30% of which has been contaminated by radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Families can no longer go fishing or berry and mushroom gathering; many people have gone bald. Viola has tried to help by authoring and publishing a book on what people can do to reduce the danger of illness due to radiation exposure.

During other evenings, Steve and Nailya visited a biodynamic farm nearby, and the whole group was led on foot by EMC staff members Evgeny Shmelev and Viktor

Voronkov to fine dacha gardens of the college and EMC staff members, including that of EMC Director Ivan Zakharovich Antiushin. Each had 700 sq.m. of area, fully planted with many typical Russian vegetables and fruits: cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes in the greenhouses; squash, cabbage, potatoes, beets, strawberries, gooseberries, raspberries, and apples in the open ground. One gardener joked that the Colorado potato beetle prefers Russian potatoes to American varieties. We were interested to see a small wind-driven noisemaker that drives moles away and recalled that garden catalogs here offer something similar for our gophers.

Before departing for home, the ag college teachers talked with Ludmila Zhirina about their need for curriculum materials for teaching BI. Ludmila promised to copy and send the materials Bryansk teachers have been using for years. Now she is inspired to disseminate them across the country, to all the administrative divisions of Russia. And the EMC has encouraged her to send them to the 285 colleges in the Ministry of Agriculture network. (See article on *Ekologicheskii ogorod* on page 2 for our follow-up work on this promise.)



Dacha gardener Viktor Kirsanov chats with Steve Moore, Nailya helping

Postage and photocopies cost money, of course, and Ludmila and her co-director Igor Prokofiev have personally been footing the bill. Tax-deductible donations to Ecology Action for the work of Biointensive for Russia will be gratefully accepted! Just send them to Carol Vesecky (checks made out to Ecology Action), c/o BfR, 831 Marshall Dr., Palo Alto CA 94303 with the completed form below and your funds will return with Ludmila or Irina. Donors of \$30 or more will receive a "junk mail reduction kit" based on the City of Palo Alto's instructions (see <http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/recycle/junkmail.html> )

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**MORE STORIES TO COME & AVAILABLE**

BfR's new Web master Berta Pires is preparing a new look for the site, already having added new material from 2002 and an updated BfR history. (Shoshana and Ari fortunately remain on the team.) Berta currently volunteers for us due to the economic downturn in Silicon Valley – please write or call if you can suggest a software job for her. Our site <http://biointensiveforrussia.igc.org> should soon be updated with new photos, an account of our visit to the Obruch family in Karelia that lives closely in harmony with nature, Abby Youngblood's report on her visit to Sortavala and Valaam Island, and more!

### Upcoming Events:

Wed.-Sat., Jan. 22-25 - Eco-Farm Conference, Asilomar: BfR presents "Healing the Earth..." Thurs. 1/23, 10:30-12. (See article on p. 1.) Cost to attend one day, \$95. Visit <http://www.eco-farm.org>, click "Eco-Farm Conference" for details.

Wed., Jan.29, 7-9 pm - Valley of Heart's Delight hosts slide and PowerPoint presentation "Healing the Earth: Successes with Biointensive Mini-farming in Uzbekistan & Russia" at Foundation for Global Community, 222 High St., Palo Alto. RSVP <[cvesecky@igc.org](mailto:cvesecky@igc.org)> or Susan Stansbury <[ssstansbury@globalcommunity.org](mailto:ssstansbury@globalcommunity.org)>, or just come! (Free of charge, donations accepted)

Fri. Jan. 31 – Evening slide show on Irina's and Ludmila's work and our Culture/Eco-Ag tour of last summer – at the home of Horst and Candice Simon in Midtown Palo Alto. Call or write Carol for details

VegFair at Santa Clara County Convention center - Sat. Feb. 1, 10 am - 6 pm. <http://www.vegfair.org>

Feb. 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 - Events TBA at UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis, and in Fair Oaks areas. Call or write Carol for details

Sat. evening, Feb. 8 - "Healing the Earth" Fundraiser Potluck and Program including music at the Santa Cruz Live Oak Grange - Call or write Carol for details. Co-sponsored by the Community Alliance for Family Farmers <http://www.caff.org/> and the Santa Cruz Live Oak Grange <http://www.greengrange.org/>

Wed. Feb. 12 - Fond farewell to Irina at SFO

Feb. 13-20 - Possible visit to SLUG gardens in San Francisco with Ludmila

Feb. 15, 2-4 pm - Midtown Growing Circle lesson on red worms, potato and onion growing

Feb. 21-23 - Russian Festival at the Russian Center in San Francisco

Feb. 24 (or earlier) - Fond farewell to Ludmila

*Irina and Ludmila, cont'd from page 1* to 749 young people and adults in a high school in Chirchik and in various communities since 1995, and graduated 164 students with a high-school "major" in Biointensive mini-farming and soil science. Irina and her best students travel regularly to six remote mountain and desert villages to teach this resource-conserving, high-yield method to the mainly Tajik inhabitants. Irina has prepared a proposal for five years of funding for a Mini-Ag Center for Central Asia which we hope to submit soon to a friendly foundation. Any and all suggestions are encouraged and will be graciously received.



Viola's Biointensive harvest in 2001

Ludmila Zhirina and the NGO "Viola" have experimented with BI for four years with excellent results, including in areas of their region contaminated by radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Their truly impressive program has included school programs, as well as workshops and conferences for administrators, teachers, students, farmers, and dacha gardeners – 350 of them, just in 2002! Ludmila and Viola's current executive director, Igor Prokofiev, are writing a textbook on Biointensive, and plan to collaborate on a series of translations of Ecology Action books, starting with *Test Your Soil With Plants* by John Beeby.

During Irina's and Ludmila's visit we will work on our grant proposals (see article on page 2 about our plans involving activities in the Russian Far East). We'll also pay a visit to John Jeavons in Willits during which last year's research results will be discussed, drop in to organic gardens here and there, and give joint presentations to various groups (see "Upcoming Events" at left).

**To get in touch quickly, write or phone:**

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