

A RECOUNT OF THE GATHERING ON FEBRUARY 9TH, 2019

SPRING 2019, ISSUE 1



Our first gathering, held at the Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm in Petaluma, California.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

“As a group, we change the dynamic. There are so many sayings in Chinese Medicine about strength in numbers.”

– Andy Ellis, Founder of Spring Wind Herbs

Dear Friends,

The seed for this alliance sprang from a long-running goal to create an entity to educate and facilitate in the chain of production of Asian medicinal herbs.

This group began the incubation of an entity to address the need for such a

market, a bridge from seed catalogue to materia medica, in November of 2018 as a grassroots enterprise. The February 2019 gathering at the Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm was our first greater meeting, attended by folks from throughout northern California and Oregon, many of whom are former interns studying under Peg Schafer. The alliance is an enterprise in education as well as one of market and end-product creation.

– Nancy Salcedo and Luciana Huang

LETTER OF THANKS

Thank you to all who attended the winter gathering. We feel the meeting was a rousing success. Our first goal was to meet you all and hear your thoughts and needs. Apparently there is a lot of common ground, which just gives more clarity to what needs to be done. Secondly, we wanted to come up with good solutions to advancing this into a burgeoning industry and we couldn't be happier. You all shared so many exciting and tangible ideas. Your support means everything to this project and we are very appreciative.

– Dave Melly, LAc

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OUR COMMITTEE

COORDINATORS

Carl Kircher

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Dave Melly

Deborah Dennis

Emily Baron

Kathy Wolman

Luciana Huang

Mari Silva

Monique Monteverde

Nancy Salcedo

Nicole Miller

Peg Schafer

Peregrine Zoe Whitehurst

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Andy Ellis

Peg Schafer

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We're **seeking coordinators** for all levels of starting up and running our organization. If you'd like to get involved, please email Peg at pschafer@sonic.net.



WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS FROM OUR FIRST GATHERING

During our inaugural gathering, our diverse group of herb growers, practitioners, and students participated in small group discussions to brainstorm and share ideas to carry our group forward.

The Big Vision

Our Big Vision group focused on what our alliance could offer to growers. There was an expressed interest in creating a central source of information for growers, especially for those with limited time and resources to learn all the details of the supply chain. Our farmers would like support that helps them grow and expand into growing medicinal herbs. They would also like help in communicating the message of medicinal herb quality. Our farmers are instilled with the

understanding that they're part of something big, but currently feel as though they have to manage it all on their own. Another idea that came up was to establish a clearinghouse that would provide for proper storage of herbs before they go out to the market.

Growers' Needs

Our growers came up with a wish list that includes the following:

Land and good, consistent labor

A forum for growers to share ideas and information including crop trials, possibly as part of a larger educational database and website.

More sales opportunities and contracts for pre-planning before planting. A broker or cooperative.

Understanding how to identify good land, how to scale up from a small plot to multiple acres, what types of herbs to grow in specific regions.

Knowledge about potency and how to best combine our herbs together if they are coming from different soils and areas.

Information on what herbs are in demand and how much, how to plan ahead for next year's crop, how to price different herbs.

Information on how to process the herbs.

Understanding buyer expectations of herb quality.

A best-practices guide for growers, which would be shared with buyers so they know our quality control standards and what their "buyers assurance" will be.

Harvesting tools for roots, cleaning tools, and tools for other processes that are specifically herb-related.

A seed bank that we can contribute to as most growers save their own seeds.

Informal field trips to visit each other's farms.

Practitioner Needs

Our licensed practitioners and students of Traditional Chinese Medicine expressed a need for the following:

Herb quality education for practitioners and patients.

Good organic herbs that are ethically sourced and correctly processed herbs.

Transparency from manufacturers and sellers.



SPRING WIND HERBS VISIT

By Peg Schafer

Dave Melly and I had the splendid opportunity to be hosted by Andy Ellis at Spring Wind in San Leandro on March 1st. During this wonderful, and very long, visit we toured the 10,000 square foot warehouse and visited with hundreds of not only whole herbs, but his new line of single herb extract singles – all of which are tested for and 100% free of 400 pesticides.

It was quite an amazing setup and we discussed many details of specific herbs and herb marketing for a number of medicinal materials. We reviewed and did a simplified sensory analysis of some selected herb crop samples from some of our growers, as the beginning of our brokerage relationship with Spring Wind. We continued the conversation for which herbs and what a brokerage might look like for this developing market.

There are many details that need to be worked out but the advantages of working with such a mentor who supports domestic production, is a valued industry leader and will market and sell our herbs, make this endeavor much more feasible.



STANDARDS

Our Standards group discussed various guiding principals to carry us forward.

Testing

We discussed the need to establish quality standards for our herbs in terms of medicinal value as well as safety. This includes soil testing standards such as testing for the presence of heavy metals, molds and aflatoxins, and other contaminants. Andy Ellis suggested we work with a local university for testing and quality review. We can develop training programs for farmers and assist them with the lab testing process so that farmers can have a report to present to potential buyers. For safety and protection, farmers will also need to retain a sample portion of each herb batch for reference.

Organic Certification

We would like to establish a grower certification for marketability to licensed practitioners and manufacturers. National Organic Program Standard certification is costly, and as the ruling continues to be degraded by agro-industrial interests it is less trustworthy as a measure of good quality. The ruling also doesn't address product quality, cleanliness, nor ecological or social sustainability concerns. One thought is to set up an "in house" quality control program with protocol standards, and complying farmers sign a pledge to grow with ecologically sound practices without pesticides. Farm visits will be part of the program. Once in the supply chain then random testing can be done as part of the program.

As Andy Ellis mentioned, for licensed practitioners, this form of assurance will be accepted. Larger companies and manufacturers, however, will require organic certification.

Organoleptic: The importance of Qi

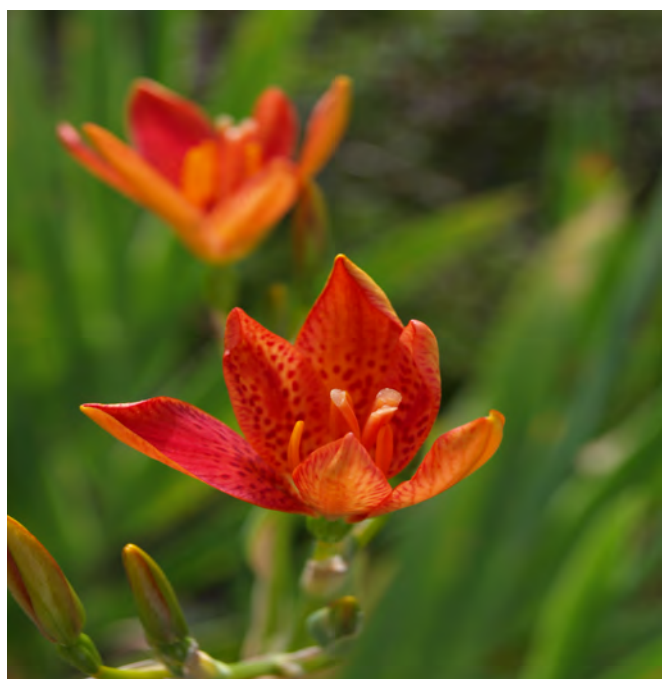
Measuring and testing for active ingredients and constituents may not give all the information needed about quality, though some testing for these could be done. The traditional way to test for herb quality is through organoleptic testing, sensory analysis based on herb characterization. We do not yet have the skills for this available in the U.S., but we may use a simplified form of organoleptics to qualify our herbs for quality assurance.

Processing

As part of our standardization efforts, we could potentially create a centralized processing and manufacturing facility. It's important to keep in mind that how an herb is processed is very herb-dependent, and the process cannot be generalized.

Branding

Some questions came up regarding branding. Will we be mixing product from farmers to create larger batches of herbs to market? Will we want to create our own brand?



ENTITY

As we continue our research and discussions into choosing an entity for our group, some of us suggest looking into coops such as the successful, farmer-based Siskiyou Coop. There's also Marin Link, a nonprofit that assists other organizations, both nonprofit and for-profit. The CDI Cooperative Development Institute might be able to offer assistance. We can also potentially link up with the Sonoma County Herb Association.

We are still formulating a name for our group. Some new name ideas include: Farm to Healing, Farm to Health, Slow Herb, Initiative for Chinese Medicinal Herb Growers of America. Previous names discussed include Chinese Herb Initiative U.S. and U.S. Chinese Herb Initiative.

As part of our entity discussion, we must also consider bylaws and grower protocols.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Our Finance group discussed costs associated with our planned goals. Labor was identified as the biggest cost and it was discussed that adding central processing to the chain of production could lower the overhead for the farmers.

A membership model would provide needed funding, while including sweat-equity memberships. We could also form a community-supported agriculture (CSA) model with practitioners, or partner with local groups such as the Sonoma County Herb Exchange. Another option is to seek out grants or investors in Asia and the U.S. who would like to underwrite a venture like this.

As far as processing goes, there are different options. One of our colleagues have created a mobile processing facility with a commercial kitchen license. Some farms could hire these services if they are locally available. Large companies like

Mayway have a central processing facility in China that are contracted with them only, and not with customers. Mayway takes care of all the direct selling.

We can also look towards community resources. Some towns such as Ukiah fund small facilities and could possibly help us towards establishing an herb processing facility. The Bay Area Worker Cooperatives like Arizmendi and Cheeseboard have a legal council to help other cooperatives get started. We can also follow Joel Salatin's model of agricultural clusters where people can share tools to reduce cost. Rogue Farm Corp offers training. Siskiyou Sustainable Coop is another model we can look into.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications group identified a list of needs and we are looking for volunteers to help us with branding, logo design, business cards, brochures and marketing materials, sample packs of herbs already being grown, website design, social media presence (Facebook and Instagram), photos, videos, podcasts, blog, articles, public outreach, media contacts, introductory letters, and fundraising.

GIFTS

We were only able to capture a small sample of what our diverse group has to offer to help us grow as a collective. We have experienced growers, practitioners, herb teachers, students, community organizers, small business owners, business strategists, MBA degree holders, technical project managers, web designers, graphic designers, writers, and editors. We have a former Mayway employee who understands the supply chain. We also have connections to folks who understand how to do GMP facilities, filmmakers, movers and shakers in the local slow food movement, herb brokers in China, and the patients we serve. As we move forward, we can find more ways to collaborate with our unique talents and skillsets.



Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm (Petaluma, California)

A SPECIAL CONVERSATION WITH ANDY ELLIS



“The difference between Western and Chinese Medicine is that Chinese Medicine looks for relationships & harmony in life. It observes nature and replicates that in our lives. Western Medicine “battles” nature.

The Chinese are learning from us about organic farming, because they have become so dependent on pesticides that they don’t know how to farm without them.

We are like a seed capsule sent over from China that may not survive there, because they are turning towards Western Medicine.” – Andy Ellis

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS FROM GROWER TO CONSUMER

We had the unique opportunity to listen to Andy Ellis, an industry leader and founder of Spring Wind Herbs. Here are some of the highlights of his presentation:

There are three market segments, which include *practitioners* (who still use bulk herbs and pills), *companies that make formulas for practitioners* (such as Kan, Griffio, Far East and Summit. This market is bigger, and they don’t always care about organic and authenticity), and *the supplement market* (the largest segment, buying tons of herbs. Here, quantity will depend on the herbs and follow the latest trends.)

Processing of the herbs is complex because every herb is different. Some herbs you have to do the processing at the farm. Others, like roots, need to be sliced before drying.

Processing includes cleaning based on each herb, sorting of debris, sorting by size, slicing by machines, drying ovens, vacuum pack machine, packaging machines for bigger volume, steaming, and grinding machine.

The simplest herbs to start with are above-ground herbs that only require drying. Good herbs to grow include mint, chrysanthemum, dandelion, purple violet, and herbs that are hard to import or are becoming more rare.

We may want to consider developing a brand and creating value-added products such as mint teas that would help us pay for a processing facility.

As a grower’s association, we have a greater ability to partner with a lab or university for quality testing than we do as individuals.

JOIN US

We're seeking volunteer coordinators for all levels of starting up and running our organization. If you'd like to get involved, please email Peg at pschafer@sonic.net.

All members are welcome to join our monthly meetings, which are held on the second Saturday of each month via Zoom web and phone conference call.

We value your feedback! Please let us know if you'd like to see for future events and newsletters. If you attended our most recent event, please take a moment to fill out the post-meeting participation sheets that are attached to this newsletter.



JOIN OUR GROUP MEETINGS VIA ZOOM ON THE 2ND SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH

Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm

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