

Ear to the Ground

Voices behind the 1,200-plus member groups of the Orion Grassroots Network



ALFREDO QUARTO, executive director of sixteen-year-old Mangrove Action Project (www.mangroveactionproject.org), leads “a global network to conserve and restore mangrove forests and related coastal ecosystems” from the Olympic Peninsula, with nine staff and interns and a \$220,000 budget.

What’s changed in my organization’s work: MAP is much more directly involved now in mangrove restoration work, and we have just launched our Seattle-based “Shrimp Less, Think More” consumer awareness campaign, addressing the issues of shrimp farming and consequent mangrove forest loss.

The worst thing I have to do: Go into my local supermarket and be depressed by their eight-foot-high, clear glass, double-doored, five-shelved, refrigerated display of orderly, stacked, colorful boxes of farmed shrimp from the global South.

The best thing I get to do: Preach to family, friends, and the choir about the problems of consuming imported shrimp and [help] change their eating habits.

My organization’s biggest success: Being the first real whistle-blower on the shrimp aquaculture industry in 1992.

Its biggest failure: To see the breakup of our once-promising international

alliance due to internal organizational problems.

The principle I wish I could live by: The process in attaining one’s goals is more important than the end, and often determines that end.

How our staff blows off steam: From our keyboards, we send small rounded stones from our slings at the heads of industry.

Where I find hope: In optimism and perseverance in the face of imminent disaster, through which I believe disaster can be averted.

Another profession I’d like to attempt: Organic blueberry farming.

The best thing anyone ever taught me: To have a dream and to question authority.

The view out my office window: Promising!

One thing I learned working here that surprised me: The view out my window is still promising!

The weirdest thing in my office: My filing system.

The sexiest person working in my field: The topless gardener in my blueberry patch!

Totem animal, vegetable, or mineral: The mangrove on its tangled roots, which binds the sea and shore together.

Most influential book: *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau.

One event that would make a big difference for my organization: If U.S. consumers stopped eating imported shrimp.

BILLIE BEST is former executive director, now a board member, of Regional Farm & Food Project (www.farmandfood.org) in New York’s Hudson-Mohawk foodshed. The all-volunteer organization works “to promote earth-friendly agriculture and community food systems.” They have been doing so since 1996, and have a budget of \$25,000.

The worst thing I have to do: Database entry.

My organization’s biggest failure: We got hung up on having an office space, a staff, and grant-funded projects, which required constant fundraising that distracted us from our mission.

The best thinkers in my field: Vandana Shiva, Joel Salatin, Michael Pollan, Susan Witt, Marion Nestle, Lester Brown.

Where I find hope: So many young people are taking back the power of food, learning to grow their own, to farm, to cook, cooking for each other.

The best thing anyone ever taught me: Change yourself, change the world.

The view out my office windows: My chickens.



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