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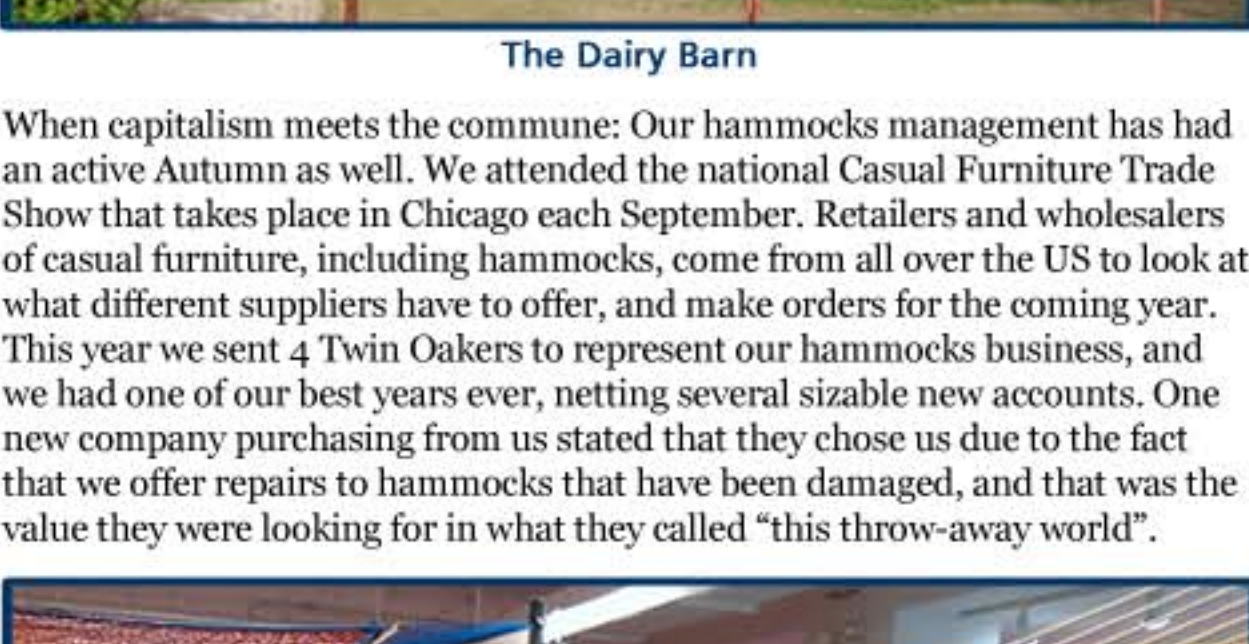
News of the Oaks

by Valerie

This past summer was busy with our everyday activities, yet fairly quiet overall. As usual, mid-August brought our two annual events—The Women's Gathering and The Communities Conference. Each year we welcome up to 200 people to spend time here, participating in organized workshops, touring the community, and just generally engaging with each other during these two consecutive weekends.

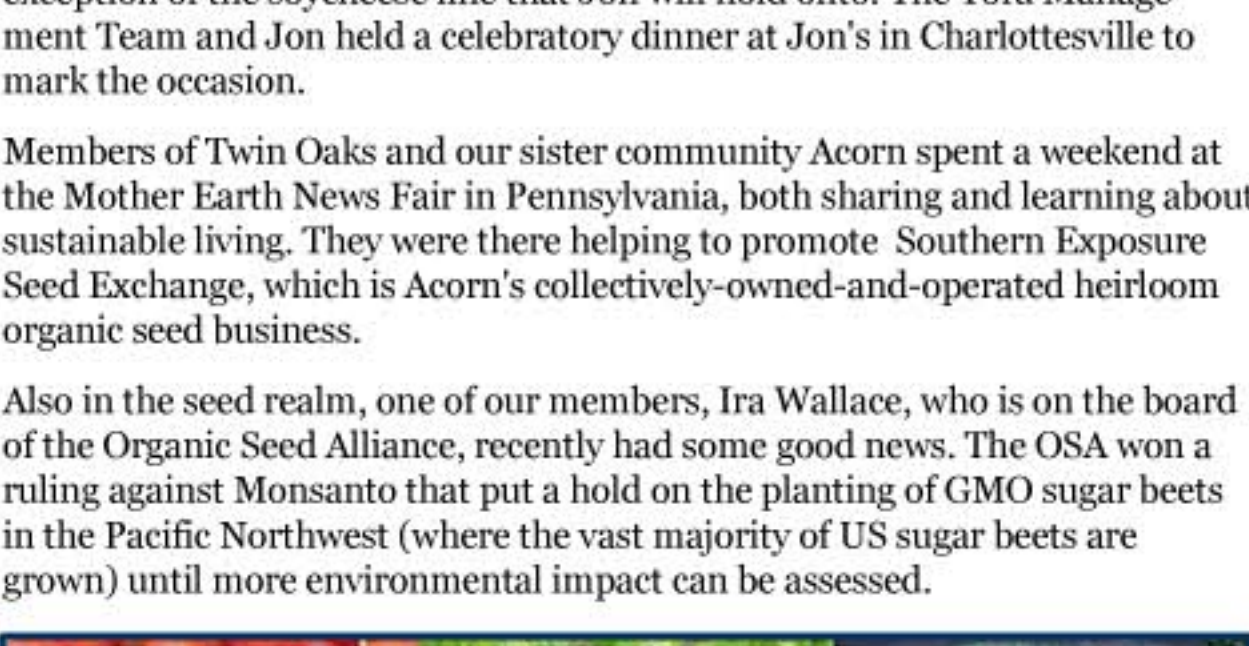
One change that autumn has brought is the return of our Waiting List. Over the summer, enough members had left the community that we were able to accept new members immediately. However, now enough of us have settled in that we once again have a Waiting List. Over the winter, each time a current member decides to leave the community, that will open up a space for whoever is at the top of the Waiting List to move here.

One group in the community that's been kept busy is the Dairy Crew. There were 5 calves born in a 4 week period, which is very unusual for our dairy program. Each year we select a theme for naming our calves—this year the theme is musical instruments. So our 5 new calves are: Lojki (a Russian percussion instrument), Fiddle, Mandolin, Euphonium, and Pennywhistle. Two of these calves are being trained as oxen for farming, non-fossil-fuel-style, at the nearby newly-forming Living Energy Farm community.



The Dairy Barn

When capitalism meets the commune: Our hammocks management has had an active Autumn as well. We attended the national Casual Furniture Trade Show that takes place in Chicago each September. Retailers and wholesalers of casual furniture, including hammocks, come from all over the US to look at what different suppliers have to offer, and make orders for the coming year. This year we sent 4 Twin Oakers to represent our hammocks business, and we had one of our best years ever, netting several sizable new accounts. One new company purchasing from us stated that they chose us due to the fact that we offer repairs to hammocks that have been damaged, and that was the value they were looking for in what they called "this throw-away world".

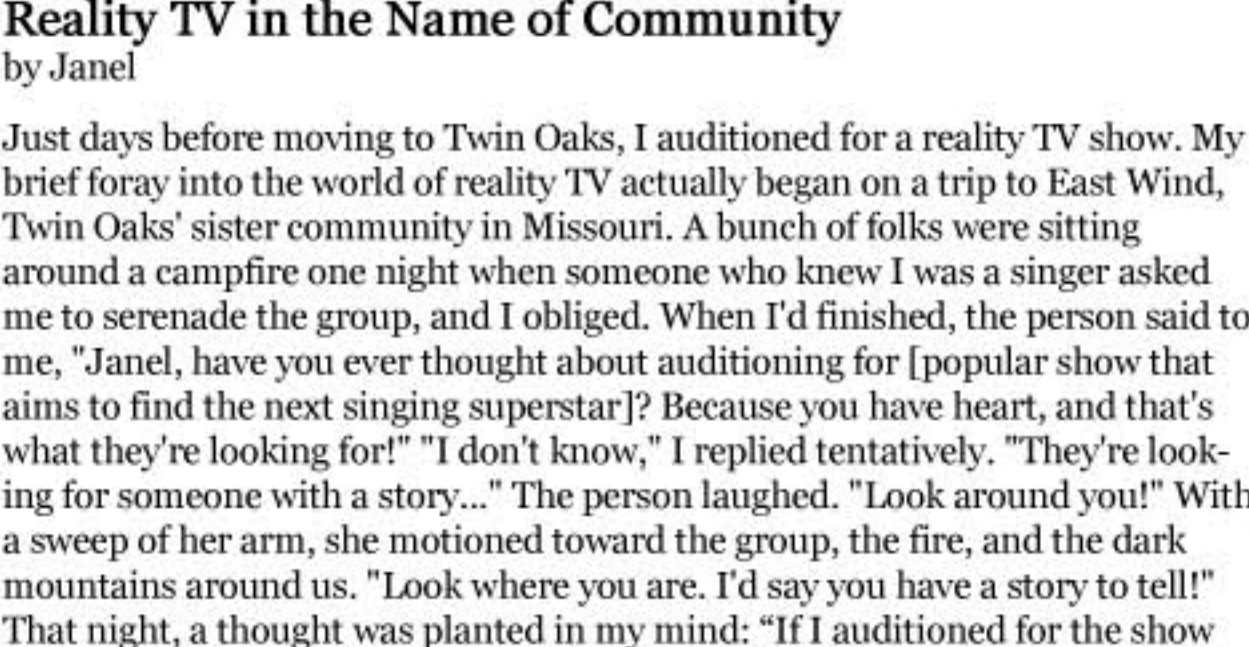


Hawina and Cloud at the national Casual Furniture Trade Show in Chicago

In other community business news, our tofu business Twin Oaks Community Foods formally purchased Sunergia Tofu from Jon Kessler, an ex-member of the community. Sunergia is a line of specialty tofu made with pesto, shitake mushrooms and other select ingredients that we had been producing for Jon, but he owned the business. Twin Oaks now owns the business, with the exception of the soycheese line that Jon will hold onto. The Tofu Management Team and Jon held a celebratory dinner at Jon's in Charlottesville to mark the occasion.

Members of Twin Oaks and our sister community Acorn spent a weekend at the Mother Earth News Fair in Pennsylvania, both sharing and learning about sustainable living. They were there helping to promote Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, which is Acorn's collectively-owned-and-operated heirloom organic seed business.

Also in the seed realm, one of our members, Ira Wallace, who is on the board of the Organic Seed Alliance, recently had some good news. The OSA won a ruling against Monsanto that put a hold on the planting of GMO sugar beets in the Pacific Northwest (where the vast majority of US sugar beets are grown) until more environmental impact can be assessed.



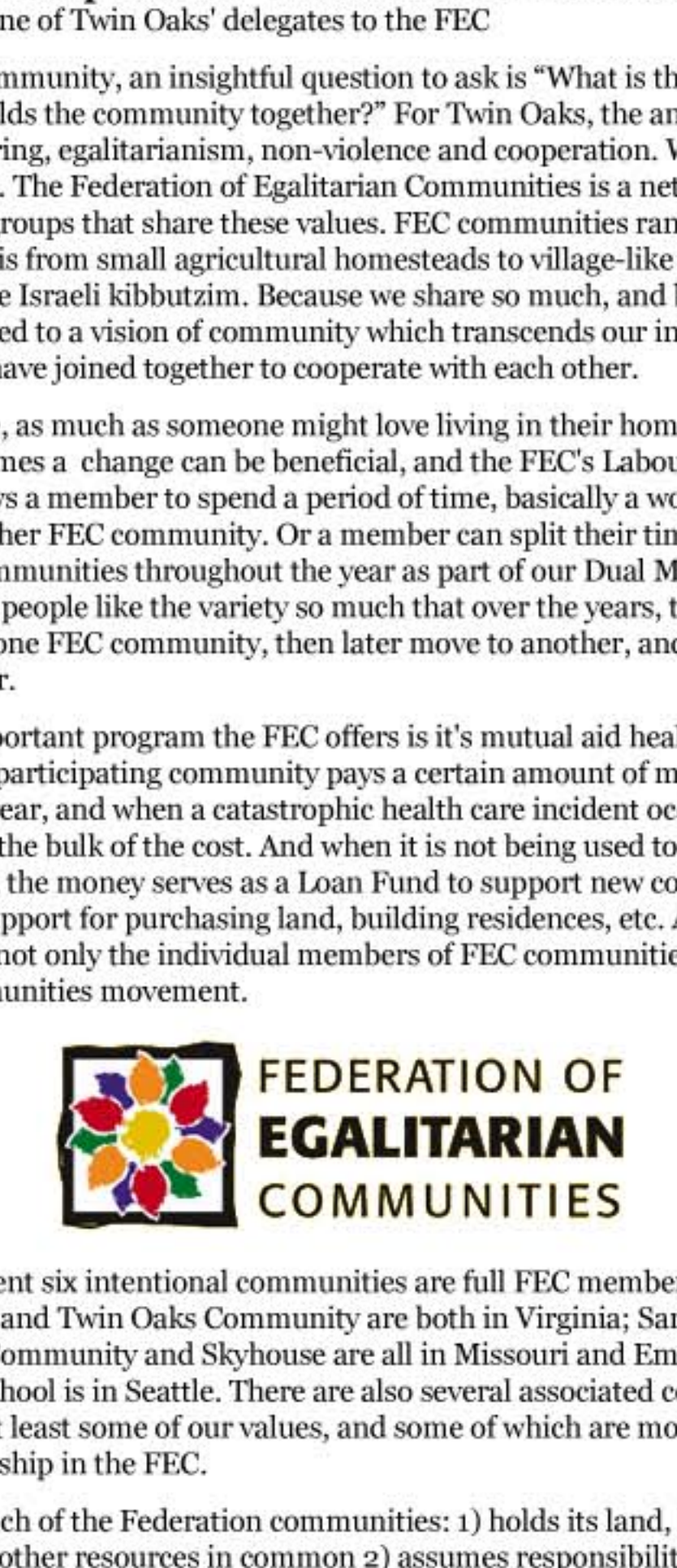
Southern Seed Exposure Seed Varieties

And in purely recreational news, the latest craze to sweep the commune is "Dominion", a designer, deck-building card game, similar to Carcassonne or Action cards of Catan. Pretty much every day several Oakers gather to play their Action cards, earn Treasure, and purchase Provinces. Plans are in the making for a Twin Oaks-themed Dominion, with Labour Credits replacing Copper and Gold, SLG's (ie. Small Living Groups, our residences) replacing Provinces and Estates, and the Action Cards relating to activities around the community.

Singing for Exposure: Auditioning for Reality TV in the Name of Community

by Janel

Just days before moving to Twin Oaks, I auditioned for a reality TV show. My brief foray into the world of reality TV actually began on a trip to East Wind, Twin Oaks' sister community in Missouri. A bunch of folks were sitting around a campfire one night when someone who knew I was a singer asked me to serenade the group, and I obliged. When I'd finished, the person said to me, "Janel, have you ever thought about auditioning for [popular show that aims to find the next singing superstar]? Because you have heart, and that's what they're looking for!" "I don't know," I replied tentatively. "They're looking for someone with a story..." The person laughed. "Look around you!" With a sweep of her arm, she motioned toward the group, the fire, and the dark mountains around us. "Look where you are. I'd say you have a story to tell!" That night, a thought was planted in my mind: "If I auditioned for the show and actually got airtime, I could expose the idea of intentional community to 30 million viewers..."



Janel singing with her college a cappella group

So, five months later, I was in line behind 10,000 fellow hopefuls. After hours of waiting, I found myself standing before the two assistant producers who would decide my fate. "Hi. My name's Janel," I said, "and I live on a commune." I then sang my song, and waited for a reaction. They just stared at me. Finally, the man asked, "You really live on a commune?" I nodded enthusiastically. "How did you find out about this community in the first place?" "I typed in 'commune' on Google!" After a few more hilarious questions (i.e. "How do you listen to music on these communes? Are there radios?!"), they motioned me forward. "You're in," the woman said to me with a wink.

Two days later, I stood in front of the show's executive producers—lights, cameras and microphones in my face—and they seemed very interested in intentional communities. After fielding questions about installing wind turbines and slaughtering animals (neither of which I know anything about, but hey, I tried), I sang my heart out. But the executive producers dismissively told me that my voice "wasn't special enough." "Sorry, it's a 'no.'" Perhaps they thought I needed a more "folk-y" sound to go with my "hippie" persona. Or perhaps they simply thought I was the kind of person who, upon being rejected, would deliver a dramatic show of emotion for the camera (which I didn't). Either way, I'm hoping that a sound bite about "the auditionee who lives on a commune" will appear on primetime TV this winter, cluing more Americans in on the fact that there are alternative ways to live one's life in this country. But if it doesn't happen, it's all right. I'll just have to figure out other ways to spread the good news!

Circles of Cooperation: Twin Oaks and the FEC

By Sabine, one of Twin Oaks' delegates to the FEC

With any community, an insightful question to ask is "What is the 'values glue' that holds the community together?" For Twin Oaks, the answer is income-sharing, egalitarianism, non-violence and cooperation. We are not alone in this. The Federation of Egalitarian Communities is a network of communal groups that share these values. FEC communities range in size and emphasis from small agricultural homesteads to village-like communities similar to the Israeli kibbutzim. Because we share so much, and because we are committed to a vision of community which transcends our individual groups, we have joined together to cooperate with each other.

For example, as much as someone might love living in their home community, sometimes a change can be beneficial, and the FEC's Labour Exchange system allows a member to spend a period of time, basically a working vacation, in another FEC community. Or a member can split their time between two FEC communities throughout the year as part of our Dual Member program. Some people like the variety so much that over the years, they live full-time in one FEC community, then later move to another, and sometimes even another.

Another important program the FEC offers is its mutual aid health care program. Each participating community pays a certain amount of money per person per year, and when a catastrophic health care incident occurs, this fund covers the bulk of the cost. And when it is not being used to cover those health costs, the money serves as a Loan Fund to support new communities who need support for purchasing land, building residences, etc. And so this fund serves not only the individual members of FEC communities but also the larger communities movement.



FEDERATION OF
EGALITARIAN
COMMUNITIES

At the moment six intentional communities are full FEC members: Acorn Community and Twin Oaks Community are both in Virginia; Sandhill Farm, East Wind Community and Skyhouse are all in Missouri and Emma Goldman Finishing School is in Seattle. There are also several associated communities, who share at least some of our values, and some of which are moving towards full membership in the FEC.

Formally, each of the Federation communities: 1) holds its land, labor, income and other resources in common 2) assumes responsibility for the needs of its members, receiving the products of their labor and distributing these and all other goods equally, or according to need 3) practices non-violence 4) uses a form of decision-making in which members have an equal opportunity to participate, either through consensus, direct vote or right of appeal or overrule 5) works to establish the equality of all people and does not permit discrimination on the basis of race, class, creed, ethnic origin, age, sex or sexual orientation 6) acts to conserve natural resources for present and future generations while striving to continually improve ecological awareness and practice 7) creates processes for group communication and participation and provides an environment which supports people's development.

If you'd like to find out more about the FEC, check out www.thefec.org.

Is It Utopia Yet?

An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community

What is it really like to live in a "Utopian" community? What happens to the high ideals of equality and social justice under the pressures of daily living with a continually-changing population of nearly a hundred people? Creating a new society presents many challenges—making a living, inventing a government, sharing the labor, raising children collectively, and reaching agreement about such things as diet, standard of living, and commitment to caring for the environment. Does full economic equality really work? How far can a group compromise its ideals for the sake of holding its members? How much social conformity is necessary for peaceful cooperative living? Just how simple should the simple life be?

Some answers to these questions are revealed in *Is It Utopia Yet?*, a book written by Kat Kinkade, who was a founding member of Twin Oaks. Kat tells how these fundamental issues have been worked on over the years of communal living at Twin Oaks. Some excerpts:

Movements and Causes

For some, developing Twin Oaks as a viable lifestyle and modeling it for others is a major contribution to society already. People with this point of view do not feel obliged to be personally involved with outside movements and organizations. Just living here, conscientiously practicing conservation and nonviolence and pursuing peaceful happiness for themselves and their friends seems sufficient.

For others this is not enough. It does not matter that we earn five or ten cash money, wear thrift-store clothing, and share one toilet among very little people. It is obvious that in real values we are rich. They feel we need to be doing as much as we can to relieve the world's misery and improve its institutions. Twin Oaks can be a base for a wide-ranging effort to help the oppressed and fight oppression.

Grow a Tomato, Eat a Tomato

By and large, the Community does not care how much it costs to raise our own food. The value the group places on freshness and organic growing methods is not measured in dollars and cents.

Twin Oaks menus offer great variety, and most visitors comment favorably on the fresh vegetables, home-baked bread, and so forth. Our cooks stretch their energies to provide enough variety at every meal so that everybody may find something acceptable. Frequently they serve several varieties of the same main dish—with and without onions, or with and without dairy products. There are usually about five different dishes at every meal—except on pizza night, when there are five different varieties of pizza instead!

Housing

Our housing standards vary somewhat from person to person, partly by personal desire and partly by circumstance. Everyone has a private room, the smallest about six feet by twelve feet and the largest ten feet by sixteen feet. In the older buildings, people have modified their rooms by adding extra windows and lofts and even one skylight. At a guess, 70 percent of the members enjoy their private rooms and the rest are waiting for something better.

Managers

The theory behind the design of our managerial system is that it is desirable to spread authority as broadly as possible. We tend to attract people who distrust hierarchies and want to cooperate with, rather than report to, other Community members.

Taking on a new managership is one of the most stimulating things a member can do. New managers usually have ideas and energy for their areas, and managerial turnover is frequently healthy for the Community. Members sometimes change jobs when they become bored or frustrated and feel the need for a new challenge.

Kat Kinkade

For more information, or to order *Is It Utopia Yet?* go to <http://bit.ly/UtopiaYet> or contact order@ic.org or 800-462-8240.

