

**ETHICAL EATING TEAM (EET)**  
First Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

**BRIEF HISTORY**

“What does it mean to eat ethically? And why are we discussing it at 1<sup>st</sup> UUAA? The newly formed Ethical Eating Team (E.E.T.) invites you to join us as we explore these questions and this provocative subject.”

Thus began the Ethical Eating Team of First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Its roots can be traced to a previous 2-year congregational initiative on the environment called Celebrating the Planet, from which formed a committee studying local and organic foods. Known as the Locavores, this group was determined not to stop when Celebrating the Planet came to a close in the spring of 2009, and they encouraged 1<sup>st</sup> UU ministers and leaders to take up the Ethical Eating CSAI.

In August 2009, Associate Minister Nancy Shaffer presented a sermon on the subject of Ethical Eating. This was followed by a World Café event on November 14, 2009, where 40+ attendees explored the following questions:

Why is Ethical Eating important or meaningful to you personally?

How is Ethical Eating a religious topic?

What events, activities relating to Ethical Eating should we do at 1<sup>st</sup> UU that would interest and excite you?

The World Café is a method used to generate discussion, excitement and enthusiasm around a particular topic. Following in-depth discussion on questions surrounding Ethical Eating, we challenged ourselves to consider where do we go from here? We defined projects that could take place within the congregation and the community, and identified volunteers to assist or take leadership of various events, “creating a menu of activities and opportunities that will help us better explore the controversies surrounding ethical eating”.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The UUAA Ethical Eating Team (EET) provides interested members, friends and the wider community with objective, comprehensive, current information needed to make informed ethical decisions about food. EET also provides support to put this information into personal practice and community projects.

**EET LEADERSHIP & MEMBERS**

The Ethical Eating Team is co-chaired by Cathy Muha [cathymuha@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cathymuha@sbcglobal.net) and Colleen Crawley [ccrawley59@comcast.net](mailto:ccrawley59@comcast.net). Reverend Nancy Shaffer serves as ministerial liaison [shaffernm@gmail.com](mailto:shaffernm@gmail.com). 1<sup>st</sup> UU member John Erdevig also serves as a leader in an advisory role. There are currently 80+ members and friends of the congregation on our EET email list, receiving the weekly newsletter.

## **WEBSITE**

Visit our website, which is managed by Cathy Muha, at <http://uuuaa.org/social-justice/faith-in-action#eet>. This link takes you to the First UU website, and we are found under Social Justice/Faith In Action. While we are currently under Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness, we could just as easily be located under Environmental Action. Our website includes a link to the UUA CSAI on Ethical Eating, as well as current information on EET events and activities.

## **NEWSLETTER**

Each week Colleen Crawley prepares the EET Newsletter which features news, announcements and requests for volunteers, upcoming EET activities and related community events and news submitted by our members. This information and the links to other organizations related to Ethical Eating has become a valuable tool for our group, who receive it weekly via email.

## **EVENTS**

### Book Discussion

Our first EET activity was a group book read of Michael Pollen's *In Defense of Food*, which introduces Pollen's personal eating policies, or as he describes them "straight forward and distinctly unscientific rules of thumb". We began with a potluck dinner, where contributors were encouraged to include at least one local food item in their dish. We then broke into two groups, and facilitators led discussions on the book. Later, as we reflected on our book read, comments included "It's so easy to adapt some of these rules in our own lives." "Some of this seems so basic, when did we lose touch with this information?" "It was a blessing to read this book."

### Grocery Store Tour

Our next event was a Saturday morning field trip to three area groceries, to meet with store managers, learn about the store's mission and their approach to local and organic foods. The stores selected represented a national chain, a Michigan-based company and a local food co-op. We were impressed to learn that the stores all followed principles or core values that were used in the decision-making process.

### Farmers' Panel Discussion

Two local farmers did a presentation on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and the political and economic realities of being a farmer today. One of the most important lessons discussed was the reality of the true costs of the food we eat; consumers complain about the high cost of organics, but fail to take into account health care issues and environmental degradation. Americans spend a much lower percentage of their income on food than Europeans.

### Sustainable Farming Presentation

An agriculture practitioner, who also teaches sustainable farming at a local college, presented the perspective of trying to feed 6 billion people on the planet while recognizing the starvation deaths of 6 million children annually. This workshop promoted the safe and regulated use of pesticides and fertilizers in farming in order to meet the world's food requirements. This was a real eye-opening workshop as it presented a radically different point of view from the current thinking on organics.

### Upcoming Events

Still to come, we have a presentation on confined animal farms (CAFO's), a series of vegetarian cooking classes including the first one on the secrets of tofu, a presentation regarding a new website that will connect consumers with local foods, a tour of a local dairy, and a forum about hunger in the community featuring local organizers that work to fight this problem. These are the events already scheduled through early May, 2010; ongoing there may be additional book discussions, field trips, potluck dinners, speakers, movies and workshops, as well as worship service involvement. The goal of EET is to average two events per month through the course of the CSAI study period.

### **ACTION PROJECTS**

One of the next steps for this group, besides the ongoing events, is to take action. With this in mind, we solicited our group for ideas on projects within the church and the wider community that would address Ethical Eating issues. The following projects are under immediate consideration.

#### Garden Club Assistance

A residential community for low-income seniors and the disabled is requesting assistance with their existing garden beds, developed to improve the residents' access to healthy produce. They are seeking labor and materials in addition to donations.

#### Earth Day Program

A local senior center has requested assistance with creating a program for Earth Day that will also feature local foods throughout the day.

#### Square Food Garden Curriculum

A member of the Locavore group is developing a curriculum for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in our religious education program. This will entail the creation and maintenance of a garden on the church's property. Food may be sold to raise funds to fight hunger or harvested and donated to a local food organization. The senior high is considering a similar program.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Ethical Eating Team was created specifically to address the UUA CSAI. However, it appears that this topic has really struck a cord within our congregation and the broader community. Perhaps it's an issue of timing – currently there are a plethora of excellent books on the shelves and the subject seems to be everywhere we look (for example, our local botanical garden is offering a series of workshops on local food issues). Whatever the reason, EET has been greeted with enthusiasm and support from our congregation. Some recent visitors to our church have indicated that they were drawn in by the fact that we were having this discussion on Ethical Eating, and our membership coordinator has heard it discussed among newer church members. The ministers continue to support our work. With the number of participants continuing to grow, EET looks forward to our ongoing study, action and reflection of the topic, and of helping to develop a draft Statement of Conscience (SOC) on Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice for the UUA.

Submitted by:  
Colleen Crawley  
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