

# Growing Farmers Growing Partners

THE NEW ENTRY SUSTAINABLE FARMING PROJECT IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF HOW AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND ENVIRONMENT STUDENTS AND ALUMNI REACH OUT TO PARTNERS IN ALL SECTORS TO ACHIEVE AWARD-WINNING RESULTS—AND LEARN AT THE SAME TIME.



Asian cucumber. Bitter melon. Purple taro. Amaranth. To many patrons of select Massachusetts farmer's markets, these fresh vegetables are exotic rare treats. To many others, they're tastes of home. And to the immigrant farmers who grow them, they represent a link to their native culture, a livelihood, and a source of pride.

"I like to produce for myself, by myself," grins Rechhat Proum, who emigrated from Cambodia in 1985. "I like making something by myself." Proum is among the dozens of farmers of Southeast Asian, West African, and Latino origins developing their commercial farming skills on leased farm sites in Massachusetts through the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP).

The NESFP is a non-profit partnership within the Center for Agriculture, Food, and Environment (AFE). Founded in 1998 by Friedman School graduate and research associate Hugh Joseph, N84, N94, this award-winning program reaches out to economically disadvantaged farmers, preserves farmland, and promotes New England agriculture.

The partnership's reach extends beyond local farmers and community-based organizations to federal and state government agencies and other universities. It's also a member of Heifer International's National Immigrant Farming Initiative (NIFI), a national network of projects and programs. And it has received coverage in local, national, and international media, including the Boston Globe, The Boston Herald, Channel 5's Chronicle news magazine, The New York Times, Gourmet magazine, the Christian Science Monitor, and the BBC.

All prospective farmers go through an intensive 18-week winter training program on crop planting, soil stewardship, risk management, and more. Friedman School students were among those who developed the curriculum, and students contribute in a host of other ways. The farms also represent a 40-acre living laboratory for research.

No matter what the nature of their involvement, Friedman students are deepening their understanding of sustainable agriculture and international populations. And they're making a difference in the lives of people. People like Cambodian refugee Visoth Kim, who savors a bite of one of his Asian cucumbers and murmurs, "The whole world, if it makes more food, will be at peace."

#### From the Field to the Senate

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) benefits New England farmers and must continue to do so, reported Kathleen Merrigan, Ph.D., to the U. S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in January 2007. Merrigan, director of the Agriculture, Food and Environment (AFE) Program, testified in favor of the CSP, which pays farmers for good land stewardship. The program faced reauthorization and possible changes in the 2007 Farm Bill.

"Green payments are the future of agricultural support," stated Merrigan, who presented findings from a Tufts study illustrating the positive impact of the CSP on representative New England farm types and crops, conducted in collaboration with the

American Farmland Trust. She was joined in the Senate Committee hearings by three of the four AFE students who contributed to the study, all 2006 graduates: Meaghan Donovan, Christine H. Lee (also MPH06), and Britt Lundgren. Jody Biergiel, in California, was unable to attend.

"We were fortunate to be able to release our study just as the debate on the 2007 Farm Bill was starting to get moving, so the research we did was timely and relevant," says Lundgren, now an Agricultural Policy Fellow for Environmental Defense in Washington D.C. "It was really exciting to see the work we did actually being used to influence policy."

#### How Students Reach Out

- Identify, assess, and solicit suitable farmland for immigrant farmer expansion.
- Assist at training farm sites or farmers' markets.
- Maintain project demonstration plots.
- Coordinate training and technical assistance.
- Develop point-of-sale materials for farmers' market and produce buyers.

#### Research: Science and Policy

Examples of Friedman students' projects involving NESFP:

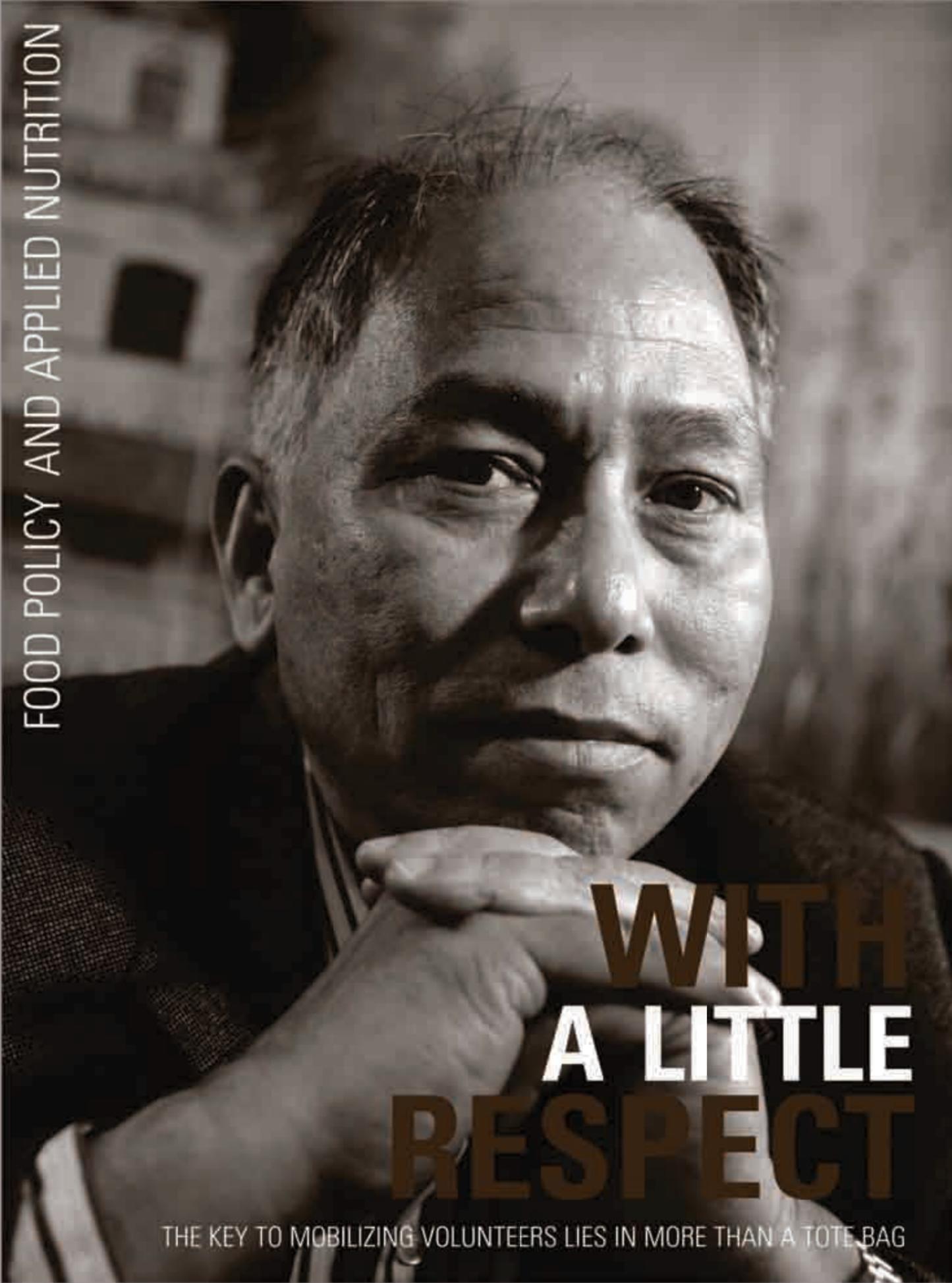
- A Comparative Analysis of Jewish and Hmong Farming Projects in America. Justine Kahn, M.S., AFE '04
- Survey of Pesticide Use Among Participants of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Guy Koppe, M.S., FPAN '03
- The Political Ecology of Migration: Hmong Immigrants and Environmental Imaginations. April (Heideman) Merleaux, M.S., AFE '02

#### NESFP Earns National Glynwood Harvest Award

NESFP was awarded a 2006 Harvest Award for Connecting Communities, Farmers, and Food by the Glynwood Center, a non-profit that helps communities grapple with the tension between economic development and resource conservation.



IN 2002 AN ESTIMATED 3,000 FARMERS' MARKETS EXISTED IN THE UNITED STATES, NEARLY A TENFOLD INCREASE FROM THE EARLY 1970S.



# WITH A LITTLE RESPECT

THE KEY TO MOBILIZING VOLUNTEERS LIES IN MORE THAN A TOTE BAG

**WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE TASKED WITH MOBILIZING A NATIONWIDE CADRE OF WOMEN VOLUNTEERS TO DISTRIBUTE VITAMIN A CAPSULES TO CHILDREN SIX TO 59 MONTHS OLD, YET LACK MONEY FOR STIPENDS? YOU GET CREATIVE. AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT FPAN GRADUATE RAM SHRESTHA, M90, DID IN HIS HOMETOWN OF NEPAL IN 1991, WHEN THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HIRED HIM TO IMPLEMENT NEPAL'S VOLUNTEER-BASED NATIONAL VITAMIN A PROGRAM.**

Lack of vitamin A was contributing to high infant mortality and night blindness; one capsule, taken twice a year, could make all the difference.

Raising volunteers' visibility and stature in the community was the key to mobilizing them to distribute the capsules. He went from village to village, educating and recruiting women (mainly grandmothers), giving them green bags bearing the vitamin A logo to carry wherever they went. He told program supervisors with cars to offer rides to bag-toting volunteers. And he used word of mouth to trumpet his follow-up visits with a VIP, the district chief, to volunteers. Finally, to ensure the whole family's support for grandma's volunteer work, he gave family members recognition and benefits as well.

Shrestha, named director of the National Vitamin A Program in 1995, has seen the rate of vitamin A deficiency-related eye disease plummet and infant mortality cut in half since the 1980s. "The beauty of this program is that the community has taken ownership," he says. During the semiannual distributions, "you can go to any part of Nepal—even to the remote villages at the base camp of Mount Everest—and see a volunteer distributing vitamin A capsules."

To what does Shrestha attribute the program's wholesale acceptance? "The most influential thing is your nature, your respect for other people, how much you create an environment of trust," he replies. His work—now being copied by other developing nations—has earned him multiple national and international public health/service awards from groups such as the Global Health Council, the Nepal Public Health Association, and His Majesty the King of Nepal. In 2005 *Time* magazine cited him as one of the world's heroes in fighting disease.

Today Shrestha encourages local communities to build endowment funds to offer stipends to volunteers. Others have told him that the plan is overambitious, but more and more villages are starting to set up funds. "With very simple things, you can change peoples' attitudes and behavior," Shrestha believes. "With simple things, you can do a lot." The proof? It's in the commitment of the tens of thousands of women who distribute vitamin A. And in the eyes of the millions of children who take it.