Biology 131 Laboratory

Discovering and Interviewing a Biodiversity Hero at the Common Ground Fair

Objectives
To gather some background information on an individual associated with the Common Ground Fair;
To find out how this individual became involved in her/his field of interest;
To determine how this person views the relationship of her/his activities to biodiversity; and
To report your findings in an oral presentation to the rest of the class.

Background
The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), is an educational organization dedicated to encouraging the production of healthy food and conserving the environment. To quote from MOFGA’s mission statement, “The purposes of the Association are to help farmers and gardeners grow organic food, to protect the environment, to promote stewardship of natural resources, to increase local food production, to support sustainable rural communities, and to illuminate for consumers the connections among healthful food, environmentally sound farming practices, and vital local communities.” Formed in 1971, MOFGA is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the United States.

Since its inception in 1976, the Common Ground Fair has been dedicated to showcasing local producers of organic food and crafts, and to hosting a gathering of Maine social and political action organizations that share some of MOFGA’s educational goals. To quote from MOFGA’s web page, “The Fair allows fairgoers to make connections with a rapidly expanding base of organic farms in the state of Maine. Hundreds of vendors, exhibitors and demonstrators, more than 1,000 volunteers, and roughly 50,000 fairgoers will gather to: share knowledge about sustainable living; eat delicious, organic, Maine-grown food; buy and sell beautiful Maine crafts and useful agricultural products; compete in various activities; dance; sing and have a great time.” Only locally produced organic food is served at the fair, and all the vendors, exhibitors, entertainers, and organizations participating in the fair must be (with only a few rare exceptions) from Maine.

Who is eligible to be interviewed
The subject of your interview may be anyone of the hundreds of fair participants. A complete directory of fair participants (along with contact information in case you need to do some follow-up) can be found in the Fair booklet and on the Fair web page. The directory is divided into the following categories:

- Agricultural Education Booths
- Agricultural Education Speakers and Demonstrators
- Agricultural Products
- Agricultural Products Speakers
- Children's Entertainment
- Country Kitchen Demonstrations
- Crafts
- Energy and Shelter
- Energy and Shelter Speakers
- Entertainment
- Environmental Concerns
- Environmental Concerns Speakers
- Farm and Homestead Products
- Farmer’s Market
- Fiber Marketplace
- Folk Arts
- Food
- Health and Healing

- Health and Healing Speakers
- Herb Tent
- Keynote Speakers
- Low Impact Forestry
- Low Impact Forestry Speakers and Demonstrators
- Livestock Exhibitors
- Livestock Speakers and Demonstrators
- Maine Fiber Farms
- Maine Marketplace
- Media Booths
- Media Speakers
- Native American Area
- Public Policy Teach-in
- Social Political Action Area
- Social Political Action Speakers
- Wednesday Spinners
- Whole Life Tent
- Youth Enterprise Zone
**Methods**

1. To start, you must decide upon someone to interview. There are generally two different approaches for this. First, you can be *strategic*, and peruse the participant directory ahead of time for someone that seems interesting to you, and then find that person at the fair. The advantage of this approach is that you can do some preliminary research to learn something about the person’s subject area so that you can ask knowledgeable and thought-provoking questions during the interview. The alternative approach is a bit more *adventuresome*. You can simply show up at the fair and *discover* someone who inspires you. It wouldn’t surprise me if you discover a *number* of people at the fair that you find inspirational. You can then decide ‘on the fly’ which one to interview. Both approaches are valid, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Choose the approach with which you are most comfortable.

2. To make for a more interesting interview, you should try to educate yourself about your interviewee’s field of expertise *ahead of time*. This should give the two of you more to talk about during the interview. If you take the adventuresome approach, you may need to rely on your interviewee to educate you about her/his subject area during the interview.

3. You will need to have something to take notes during the interview. The obvious choices are pencil and notebook, but a handheld voice recorder would work as well. Don’t try to reconstruct the interview from memory!! Bring something to record it.

4. To be polite, you should ask when would be a good time to conduct a *short* interview. Obviously, it would be best for you to interview the person on the spot, but you can’t necessarily count on that. If it seems like it will be impossible to interview the person during the fair, you can suggest a phone interview at a future date.

5. You are welcome to direct your questioning along whatever lines you choose, but here are some icebreaker questions to get you started:

   - How did you become involved with your interest?
   - What is the nature of your involvement? (If person is involved with business, ask about operation of business; if person is involved with an organization, ask how that organization works; etc.)
   - What is the most exciting aspect of your involvement? the most tedious?
   - What sorts of innovations have most impressed you in your area of interest?
   - Have you ever considered the relationship of your area of interest to biodiversity?

   Your good judgment and decorum should be guides on deciding how best to direct the interview. In general keep things light and upbeat. You may discover that the interview may head in an unanticipated direction. This is a good thing!! Be prepared to go with the flow. You do not need an extensive amount of information to present to the class. Presentations will only be a *maximum* of five minutes or so in length, and are intended to be an enjoyable way to share your fair experience with your lab colleagues.

6. If you are a shy person and are having trepidations about this assignment, it may be comforting to realize that most people *love* talking about themselves. Remember it’s easy to speak to someone about her/his passion.

7. If you have or can borrow a camera, bring it with you to the fair so you can take pictures of your interviewee and anything related to you interviewee’s subject of interest. The fair offers a multitude of photo opportunities. Don’t miss out on them!

8. Your presentation should include visual aids to help focus the attention of your audience. A PowerPoint slideshow is one possibility, but you may choose other approaches if you like. You may need to do some follow-up research after the interview to supplement your presentation, especially if your interviewee has a web site that has information you could include in your presentation.

9. You will deliver your five-minute (or so) presentation on your biodiversity hero in lab during the week of 30 Sept. 2007. To take the pressure off those worrying about grades, you are guaranteed full credit for making a *sincere* attempt at this endeavor. Good luck! Have fun!