

A non-profit charitable organization working with farmers and growers in Assam and on the west coast of Canada to explore links between sustainable and traditional agricultural practices.

# Fertile Ground: East/West Sustainability Network

UPDATE—FALL/WINTER 2007

## SOME OF THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

- Staff, tea growers and volunteers from our project in Assam travel to south India to visit the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems



- Funds from Rotary help furnish the new resource centre and library and provide audio-visual equipment
- The "Growing Healthy Families Project" reaches out a helping hand to women living in remote village areas

Office address:  
Box 179  
Merville, B.C.  
CANADA  
V0R 2M0

Phone:  
250 337-8348

E-mail:  
fertile\_ground2003  
@yahoo.com

Web:  
www.civaid.ca/  
fertile\_ground

## New Demonstration Garden and Resource Centre Opens in Assam!

A new resource located in a small town in northeast India has been attracting the attention of farmers, tea growers, educators and students since it opened its doors earlier this year.

Supported by Rotary Clubs from Assam and Canada, Fertile Ground and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd., the centre is located on 2 acres of land in Digboi, close to the Assam/Burma border.

The project provides information and hands-on training in simple, low-cost practices including



Staff member Pompy Ghosh applies finishing touches to the resource centre.



composting, crop rotation and use of "teas" made from cow manure, leaves, seeds and roots of local plants.

Used in combination with traditional agricultural practices, these techniques are helping growers increase yields, improve soil fertility and reduce use of hazardous pesticides and fertilizers.

With support from volunteers in Canada and India, two staff members at the centre are developing printed resource materials, videos and Powerpoint presentations in the Assamese language.

An increased demand for products such as the vermicompost produced at the project site has created new jobs for a number of people in the Digboi area.

## Mad Hatter's Tea Party

About 150 volunteers and supporters attended Fertile Ground's 4th annual fundraiser, the Mad Hatter's Tea Party,

Guests, many wearing beautiful and unique hats, enjoyed organic Assam tea, flavourful Indian chai and a selection of fabulous desserts.

The event took place in Courtenay in October and helped raise funds that will support our projects in Assam.

Keynote speaker was Samuel Godfrey, an organic farmer and co-founder of "Farmers Without Borders."



The White Rabbit and an enthusiastic group of students from the Interact Club at Highland Secondary School helped out again at this year's event.

**“The greatest constraints to growers who are shifting towards more sustainable practices are the lack of knowledge, information sources and technical support.”**

United Nations  
Food and  
Agriculture  
Report



In Ketetong village, Pabitra Ninga, a young grower from the Singpho tribe, has been able to reduce insect damage in his tea garden by using formulas made from chilis, garlic and other local plants.

## “Growing Healthy Families”

**supporting rural women to develop new skills and employment opportunities**

Many farmers in Assam are moving away from producing food primarily for their families and are now growing tea bushes and cash crops such as tomato, cabbage and cauliflower.

A reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides and intensive cultivation practices are contributing to a loss of natural soil fertility and increased crop losses due to insect pests and disease.

Funding from Canada India Village Aid ([www.civaid.ca](http://www.civaid.ca)) is making it possible for Fertile Ground to provide women with information, training and opportunities that will encourage healthy, local food production and will help them find ways to diversify and increase family incomes.

The project will target poor and marginalized women living in the Tinsukia district of Assam.



Women from Golai Village are learning how to produce and market natural fertilizers like compost and vermicompost from Taj Ahmed, manager of the Growing Healthy Families project.

## Women’s weaving project celebrates the colours and traditions of Assam

Through the Growing Healthy Families project, members of the Muliabari Self-Help Group are participating in a pilot project to develop a line of hand-woven cotton kitchen accessories.

Following a number of discussions and site visits, they decided to produce 20 prototype sets of table napkins, tea cozies, placemats and pot-holders, incorporating traditional Assamese colours and patterns into their work.

The group selected three members who face the greatest financial need to complete the work of weaving the fabric and sewing the items.

An order for 500 cloth bags to hold packets of organic loose-leaf tea has also been placed with the group. Women from other ethnic groups, including the Singpho tribe, are interested in taking up production of similar types of items which feature patterns distinct to their own community.



# Hats off to a GREAT team of volunteers, staff and partners in Canada and India!

Take a look at some of the things we've accomplished over the past 4 years!

- Conducted extensive research into sustainable, organic and traditional agricultural practices in the temperate tropics
- Provided encouragement and support to small-scale tea growers, farmers and educators in Assam's Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur Districts
- Conducted training and hands-on demonstrations on composting and production of botanical formulas for controlling insect pests
- Initiated an educational poster series highlighting some of the "best practices" of growers in Assam and here in Canada
- Began developing links between Canadian and Assamese educational institutions, and provided internships and volunteer opportunities for 6 college and university students in Assam
- Hosted 4 successful fundraising events in Canada
- Helped establish "Hridayangam", a community-based organization that provides training and support to farmers and self-help groups in Assam
- Arranged for an agricultural extension officer and a tea grower and farmer, both from Assam, to attend conferences, visit schools and meet with organic farmers and retailers here in Canada
- Participated in several national and international conferences
- Supported the development of a small cooperative here in Canada to develop markets for naturally-grown teas and handicrafts
- Initiated an educational poster series highlighting some of the "best practices" of growers here in Canada and in Assam
- Delivered over a hundred presentations to a wide range of audiences in Canada and India



## How you can help.....



### Make a donation

We're a charitable organization registered with Revenue Canada.

Visit our website for some unique donor opportunities. Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$25 or more.



### Join Fertile Ground

Individual memberships are \$10 & family memberships \$20. Call us at 250 337-8348.



### Volunteer

From time to time, we need administrative help, writers, event organizers, bakers, ticket sellers, graphic artists, researchers, etc. Contact us for more information!

# Fertile Ground:

## East/West Sustainability Network

Promoting and supporting sustainable agricultural practices in Assam, India and on Vancouver Island, Canada



The projects we're working on in Assam are also supported through contributions from:

Canada India Village Aid, Vancouver, B.C.

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

World Community Development Education Society, Courtenay, B.C.

Rotary Clubs of Digboi (Assam)

Strathcona Sunrise and Cumberland Centennial (Canada)

Rotary District 5020, Rotary International

and by a great group of volunteers and individual donors, just like you!

## Our goals for 2008-2009



- work with Digboi Women's College to develop a new course in organic horticulture



- continue to provide work experience and cross-cultural opportunities for students from Canadian colleges and universities



- create an East /West series of colour posters in English and Assamese languages to share information about sustainable agricultural practices in both countries

