

# Turning "Enemies" Into Friends

by Honey Rubin

In recent weeks I've spent many hours talking with the GOGA Board and Lisa Ray of the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Ms. Ray wrote the *Farmers and Consumers Market Bulletin's* series of articles, which ended on March 7, in an attempt to assure consumers of the safety of chemically grown food. The sidebar of the final article was astoundingly biased and considered to be a serious breach of trust in the relationship between our organizations. She also authored the somewhat unfortunately worded attempt at reconciliation on April 4.

GOGA's Board has received many phone calls from members and non-members alike expressing a generally negative reaction toward the articles and a loss of trust toward the *Market Bulletin* and the Department of Agriculture. The most frequently asked questions have been, "What shall we do??" and "What is GOGA's official response and position on this issue?"

In a full Board meeting on April 7, after weeks of previous discussion, we decided to make no "official" GOGA response to the series. We are instead focusing our attention on taking what could have been a disaster and turning it into a victory. We realize we


must take a more active role in seeing that GOGA and the entire alternative agriculture movement get a fair share of media attention, especially in the *Market Bulletin*. We are now negotiating a periodic column using information from members and non-members to let the general public and farming community know of both proven and low input, organic production methods under study.

We also took a firm, clear stand on insisting that the breach be healed without glossing over it but, more importantly, without sticking their noses in it. A relationship is, after all, very much like a good organic garden: we put in only those things we'd be willing to swallow later. By staying in our own integrity, focusing our attention on solutions rather than real or imagined problems, and by being absolutely courteous even as we insist that they allow Georgians to read unbiased reports of the advances in alternative gardening practices we take responsibility for the level of courtesy, trust and integrity that we want present between us. We act organically. We address the issue by taking immediate steps to restore a healthy environment in the safest way possible just as we do in our gardens and fields.

If you choose to respond to the articles, please remember facts and tact go fur-

ther than emotional put-downs. Write as a private individual, not referring to GOGA or your membership. We request that all articles and letters which identify the author as a GOGA member be read by me and another Board member prior to publication to support our policy of being builders of bridges and not soldiers at war.

Abraham Lincoln was once challenged on a previous public commitment he had made about destroying his enemies. He replied that he was setting about destroying his enemies in the most powerful way he knew: by turning them into friends. We urge you to make the most of what looks on the surface to be a disconcerting and unfortunate incident, and take the opportunity to express your interest and confidence in alternative production methods in a way that turns "enemies" into friends.

**Editor's note:** In March, Lisa Ray issued the following statement to GOGA through Honey Rubin. "The sidebar addressing the organic issue was not meant as an attack. I am personally sorry that it did not address all aspects of organic production issue and therefore, did not remain in perspective. In future issues we will (take) a broader look in putting our current existing knowledge of organics into perspective." 

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