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Guardian Article on Paraguay Prompts Vigorous Discussion

MCCN exists to support the Church in its green discipleship. We encourage collaboration and networking, and our web site is designed to showcase positive change taking place among Mennonite institutions and families. We typically post hopeful stories about people putting up solar panels, biking to work and planning inspiring events.

On October 4, an article that did not quite fit our categories appeared in *The Guardian*, a major British newspaper. "Chaco deforestation by Christian sect puts Paraguayan land under threat," the headline read. The author, John Vidal, is the paper's environmental editor.

Vidal asserts that Mennonite farmers in the Chaco are "expanding aggressively," using a style of farming "totally unsuited to the fragile soils of the Chaco" and causing desertification and erosion in one of the world's most fragile and diverse environments. Within days, a number of other environmental sites had picked up the story. A follow-up, detailing some responses from Paraguay appeared in *The Guardian* October 22.

The Paraguayan article prompted vigorous discussion among MCCN's Creation Care Council and raised a number of issues for us at MCCN. Among them:

- If we are committed to fostering healthy communication around environmental topics in a world given to polarization, how do we handle news that isn't good?
- Is it appropriate for a North American organization to report on environmental problems in other countries when most of us know little or nothing about the context?
- How can we model thoughtful and reflective approaches to conflict?

If you have a special interest in the Paraguayan Chaco you can read the following:

Vidal's [October 4 article](#) and [follow up](#)
Additional commentary on the [World Land Trust](#) web site
[A report on the Chaco](#) from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

However, for most of us thousands of miles away, this situation is perhaps most helpful as a mirror on our own context. Land use issues in the Chaco should come as no surprise to us, as we live with similar situations in North America. Here in northern Indiana, where three members of the Creation Care Council live, European settlers—many Mennonites among them—drained wetlands for farming to such an extent that only 15% of Indiana's original wetlands remain. We are also familiar with the stark disagreement among North American Mennonites as to what constitutes appropriate farming practices and land use. Many of us are industrial farmers; others are passionate advocates of organic and small-scale sustainable methods.

Therefore, our reader response question for November is:

Interactive Corner

We welcome your responses.

- Where, in your local context, have you witnessed tension between people who make a living from the land and environmental advocates?
- Where have you witnessed fruitful dialog or models for working at these issues?

Meet the Creation Care Council: Luke Gascho



Luke Gascho was instrumental in creating the Mennonite Creation Care Network and chairs the Creation Care Council.

On October 12, The Evangelical Environmental Network interviewed Luke for its weekly creation care podcast. The 20-minute interview is entitled [Christianity and Environmental Learning](#). Listen in to find out what Luke does at Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College, how he came to his vocation and what lifestyle issues the Gascho household is tackling right now.

Recent Posts on our Web Site

EMU to Dedicate Largest Solar Project in Virginia

Eastern Mennonite University's library roof is now clothed with a layer of 328 photovoltaic panels, capable of generating 104 kilowatts of electricity. On November 15 during a dedication ceremony, President Loren Swartzendruber will flip the switch that activates the array. To read more about this project and its innovative financing, see EMU's [solar page](#) or [MCCN archives](#).

Greening Our Mennonite Conventions

We've added [green convention pages](#) to the MCCN web site in preparation for the MCUSA convention in Pittsburgh this summer. Learn about the world's first convention center to earn a gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council and gather green travel tips for youth and adults.

100 Shades of Green: Welcome, New Congregations!

Several more churches joined our quest for 100 shades of green lately. They are:

Congregation	Location	MCCN Liaison
SeedLife Network	Calgary, Alberta	Leighton Tebay
Assembly Mennonite Church	Goshen, Indiana	Dave Ostergren
Berea Mennonite Church	Atlanta, Georgia	John Wierwille

[Click here to be the link](#) between MCCN and your congregation.
[See the list](#) of congregations.

Coming Up:

The Sustainable Food & Farming Conference returns to Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mount Pleasant, Pa., February 25 – 27, 2011. The weekend retreat is designed to provide resources, networking opportunities and inspiration to those committed to or interested in growing food in sustainable, environmentally responsible ways. It also features a spiritual component, examining the deep-rooted connections between food, farming and faith.

Brian Snyder, Executive Director of Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), will serve as keynote speaker for the weekend. Snyder's background in agriculture, community-based organizations, and theology will greatly inform his theme for the weekend—Food, Farming & Faith: Cultivating Wholeness.

Bryan Moyer Suderman, a singer/songwriter from Stouffville, Ontario, will lead worship at the event. A rich slate of workshops will supplement the conference's plenary sessions; descriptions and presenter bios can be found on [Laurelville's web site](#).

Resources:

Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Time to the Present

By Jan Bender Shetler, Ohio University Press

Thinking about farming practices in Paraguay brought to mind a course in environmental history I (JHS) once had with Jan Bender Shetler, a history professor at Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. Shetler, who has spent a good deal of time in East Africa, brings an international perspective to the Western environmental movement. While the Serengeti has become a symbol of global conservation efforts, the voices and perspectives of its original inhabitants are rarely heard. In her most recent book, Shetler provides a window into the ways people native to the Serengeti view their homeland.

Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal In India 1947-1997

By Michael Lewis, Ohio University Press

This is another book capable of stretching North American minds. The author suggests that Western-style environmental science and understandings of conservation are cultural exports like blue jeans or movies and must be carefully evaluated in new contexts. For example, elephant management does not rank high on the priority list of U.S. scientists (for obvious reasons.) When these priorities are exported to a country like India, issues important in the new context may be overlooked and underfunded.

And on the sustainable living front...

Living More with Less 30th Anniversary Edition

By Doris Janzen; edited and updated by Valerie Weaver-Zercher

Available from [Mennonite Publishing Network](#)

Almost 8,000 copies have just rolled off the press. By Monday, November 15, you should be able to order one. Weaver-Zercher describes the 21st century version this way:

"Living More with Less 30th Anniversary Edition collects the wisdom and experience of those who live with less than a consumer culture says we need. With stories, reflections, and advice from people around the world who are making changes to their daily habits in response to climate change and global

poverty, *Living More with Less 30th Anniversary Edition* is a vibrant collection of testimonies, old and new, of those who are discovering the joy of living with enough."

Saving the Seasons: How to Can, Freeze or Dry Almost Anything

by Mary Clemens Meyer and Susanna Meyer

Available from [Mennonite Publishing Network](#)

This book can help you master the skills you need to eat home-grown food all winter.

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Luke Gascho provides leadership for MCCN. Jennifer Schrock oversees the production of this newsletter. If you have stories or resources to share, [email her](#).