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UNH to Host the First Northeast Regional 'Soul of Agriculture' Conference Nov. 18-20

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Do you feel disconnected from your food source? Are you concerned about the effects of industrialized agriculture on land, communities and public health? Do you want to learn how to help transform the food system to reflect your values?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then join local farmers, agricultural organizations, faith communities, policy makers and educators for the Nov. 18-20 conference "The Soul of Agriculture: New Movements in New England Food and Farming" at the the University of New Hampshire. It takes place in the New England Center on the university's Durham campus. The Soul of Agriculture is an international initiative to reconnect communities and their food supply. November's conference will discuss how the food system can be transformed to support local, sustainable food production and public health.

Speakers at the conference include John Ikerd, professor emeritus of agricultural economics, University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Vern Grubinger of the Center for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Vermont; Fred Kirschenmann, director of Iowa State University Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and a North Dakota grain farmer; and Eliot Coleman, nationally prominent organic farmer and author of numerous books.

At the heart of the conference are breakout sessions to facilitate discussion among participants. According to Tom Kelly, director of the UNH Office of Sustainability Programs and co-coordinator of the conference, the

theme of these sessions will be to discuss "common values, common problems, and common solutions."

"True sustainability," says John Carroll, co-coordinator of the conference and UNH professor of natural resources, "is a conversion experience, not simply a matter of tinkering." For Kelly, "sustainability is not necessarily about adopting a new set of values." Rather, he suggests that "the existing institutional arrangement of our food system contradicts the value that many citizens place on health, rural character and democracy." The purpose of this conference is not only meant to give participants a better understanding of what currently exists, but also, according to Carroll, to provide participants "a vision of what could be."

The conference will open Sunday, Nov. 18, at 5 p.m. with a welcoming ceremony and dinner banquet. Special guest at the welcoming ceremony will be New Hampshire Poet Laureate Marie Harris, who will read her poem, entitled "September Garden," that was commissioned for the conference by the UNH Office of Sustainability Programs and the UNH Center for the Humanities.

The conference is sponsored by the UNH Office of Sustainability Programs, The Center for Respect of Life and Environment, The Humane Society of the United States, Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, The Great Bay Food Co-Op, The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, The New England Small Farm Institute and UNH Center for the Humanities.

The conference is open to the public and pre-registration is required. The fee to attend is \$200 and includes six meals featuring locally grown and organic foods. Scholarships are also available. For more information, see <http://www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/fas> or contact El Williamson at (603) 862-5040 or elw2@cisunix.unh.edu.

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