



LIVE | *NOURISHING THE PLANET*

Nourishing the Planet

by Danielle Nierenberg

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Hello readers of Basil Magazine!

I am very excited to be a new contributor to Basil as I travel through sub-saharan Africa, sharing share with you some of the people, places, projects--and foods!-- I see along the way.

I'm currently a senior researcher at the Worldwatch Institute and co-Project Director of State of World 2011: Nourishing the Planet. I am blogging everyday from Africa at www.nourishingtheplanet.com. I have an M.S. in Agriculture, Food and Environment from the School of Nutrition Science and Policy from Tufts University and I worked for 2 and a half years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic.

I started this trip in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a place most Americans associate with war and hunger because of the famines of the mid 1980s and 1990s. Even today, more than 6 million people in Ethiopia are at risk for starvation so I think I had mentally prepared myself for seeing very desperate people. Instead, though, I found farmers and NGO workers full of hope for agriculture in their country. I think that's been my greatest surprise about the continent in general — how vibrant, entrepreneurial, friendly, positive, and alive people are here. Six months and thirteen countries later, I'm now in Accra, Ghana, feeling more hopeful than ever that things are really changing.

I've making a point during this trip to focus on stories of hope and success in agriculture. Most of what Americans hear about Africa is famine, conflict and HIV/AIDS, and we wanted to highlight the things that are going well on the continent. There's a lot of hope out here – a lot of individuals and organizations doing terrific work – but that doesn't necessarily translate into them receiving resources or funding. We hope to create a roadmap for funders and the donor community and shine a big

spotlight on the projects and innovations that seem to be working, so that they can be scaled up or replicated in other places.

So, why should Basil magazine readers and foodies in the United States and Europe care about these projects and issues around sustainable agriculture in Africa?

I firmly believe that the foodie community in the United States and Europe are a powerful force in pushing for organically grown and local foods in hospitals and schools, more farmers markets, and better welfare of livestock and I think that some of that energy can be harnessed to promote more diversity and resilience in the food system. Right now, the world depends on just a few crops—maize, wheat, and rice—which are vulnerable not only to price fluctuations, but the impacts of climate change. Many indigenous crops—including millet, sorghum, sweet potato, and many others—however, are not only more nutritious than monoculture crops, but also more resilient to adverse weather events and disease.

By supporting—and funding—NGOs and research institutions, such as Slow Food International, Heifer International, and the World Vegetable Center, wealthy foodies can help ensure that farmers in sub-Saharan Africa help maintain agricultural biodiversity.

I hope you join me for this journey across Africa. Through Basil, I'll bring you to nearly every country on the continent, sharing with you things I've learned, and introducing you to people I meet. I hope that some of my articles inspire you to contact me, ask questions, share your experiences, and guide me towards projects and people you think I should see.

So, stay tuned. I'll start in Ethiopia, the country where this journey began...

Nourishing the Planet's research trip to sub Saharan Africa kicks off in Ethiopia and Danielle Nierenberg describes her first impressions of the capital city, Addis.