



fao  
**Casa**  
gazette

JULY 2011

Keeping people with you-the  
poverty of the charcoal woman

Memorial to Åke Olofsson

Megaliths, Romans, Wine:  
the Secrets of Portugal.

AFRAM celebrates the  
Africa Week 2011

World Food Day  
Essay Competition

FAO Staff Artists Corner

La Selva di Paliano

Mensile - No. 07 2011 - Reg. Trib. N. 574 dell'8/10/1990

## GRANNY FARRELL

*by Margaret Farrell*

My Irish grandmother lost her mother when she was four;  
I never asked her how she grew up without her.  
At sixteen she left her homeland for Liverpool to find work as a domestic;  
I never asked her if she was afraid.  
She married an Irishman called Pollock and had three daughters;  
I never asked her if she was happy.  
Pollock died and she was alone again with three children to raise;  
I never asked her if she'd had time to grieve.  
She met my grandfather, married again and had three more children, a  
girl and two boys;  
I never asked her if she'd found hope.  
My grandfather went to war to meet his death;  
I never asked her if she despaired.  
She lost her first three daughters to tuberculosis;  
I never asked her if she'd grown used to death.  
She collected dirty washing from pubs and transported it in a pram to the  
public wash-house with her dog by her side;  
I never asked her if she was tired.  
She went to mass every morning and said the rosary every night;  
I never asked her if that was her comfort.  
She lived with us when she was very old and told me lots of stories  
but I never asked her how she felt.  
Perhaps I was too young and carefree; perhaps she was too cheerful to  
make me think that she had ever been sad.  
It's too late now to ask her, so I am left to wonder ...



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*Contents*

**JULY 2011**

**Cover:**

**Charcoal trader: No, not the woman in the story, unfortunately, she wasn't captured on film – but a gorgeous study highlighting the vitality, colour and strength of women as market traders everywhere in Africa. Photo by Peter Steele**

- 2** Poets Nook  
*by Margaret Farrell*
- 5** Keeping people with you-the poverty of the charcoal woman  
*by Peter Steele*
- 12** Memorial to Åke Olofsson
- 13** Megaliths, Romans, Wine: the Secrets of Portugal.  
*by Tony Grey*
- 15** Children's Summer Camp
- 16** AFRAM celebrates the Africa Week 2011  
*by Simplice Ngathe*
- 20** World Food Day Essay Competition
- 25** FAO Staff Artists Corner  
*by Flavia Carbonetti*
- 28** La Selva di Paliano  
*by J. Stevenson*
- 30** Fish & Seafood for the Summer  
Mussels in sauce  
Fettuccine with courgettes & prawns  
Marinated Tuna  
Cocktail Mojito  
*by Edith Mahabir*

Typewritten electronic contributions for the FAO CASA Gazette are welcome. These can be in English, French, Italian or Spanish - articles, poems, drawings, photographs, etc. in fact anything interesting that staff members and/or their families in Rome or the field may like to contribute. No anonymous material will be accepted, and the Editor reserves the right to choose and/or reject material that is not in keeping with the ethics of the Organization. Send contributions electronically to the Editor at [jill.stevenson@fao.org](mailto:jill.stevenson@fao.org) or leave signed copies with the COOP Office on the ground floor of Building E. The deadline for editorial material is due on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month preceding the date of issue.

The Editor may schedule articles according to the priorities and editorial requirements of the FAO Staff COOP. The FAO CASA Gazette is published every month.



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Football Women	Ms R. Nettuno	56742
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Volleyball Women	Ms A. Laurenza	55344

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## Keeping people with you – the poverty of the charcoal woman

by Peter Steele

*There are people who continue to live in your subconscious long after they have passed out of your life; and these are not simply loved ones or those with whom you spend many waking hours. These are sometimes people who are complete strangers but who, for some reason, leave an impact; and frequently after just a few moments. Other people may be more familiar; but continue to remain strangers. Sometimes the memory of these people lives with you for years – fading slowly into the past as other more recent people and their impact take precedence.*

*There may be a sense of wonderment, loss, pleasure, admiration or sadness; or mixed reaction that first impresses and then stays. And, should you not have an opportunity of returning to the same place or seeing the same person again, there remains the unknown for what has happened to him or her over the years. Markets and trading provide a poignant example.*



*Harar Market. African commerce in all its vitality; numerous small-traders keeping cash in circulation and stimulating the local economy. The market spills out from the Asmaddin Gate. Market infrastructure as weak as ever, and working conditions poor.*

### **Selling charcoal in Harar**

The woman was one of several small traders met during the market survey that week. Sitting under her make-shift awning made from a small square of black plastic wrapped over a wooden frame and sheltering from the sun, her face was barely

visible in the shade. It took a moment or two to focus out of the glare that reflected back from the white buildings and to catch the outline of her head; only the whites of her eyes and teeth stood out. Dressed largely in black, her clothes and skin were the colour of road dust and charcoal.



*Khatt traders. Hook your client and you have them for life; but this is not international tobacco, but a traditional stimulant plant from the region that has leapt markets to become the country's second most valuable export.*

The woman was seated on the ground with her back against the wall of an open shop, her small piles of charcoal laid neatly out in front of her in lines; four, five or six pieces of brittle charcoal each balanced in the shape of a pyramid. Strategically placed within reach of a pedestrian route across the square to the main market entrance, people and cars passed without reference to her wares. No one was buying that morning; and in the 15-20 minutes we spent with her, she sold nothing.

Bobbing down to sit beside her with the

interpreter on one side and me on the other, there was a fleeting sense of apprehension on her face before we launched into our routine of greetings and introductions. We were making a survey of market trading, looking at what was offered for sale, seeking prices and asking people what they thought of business that day. The quick assurances that we were *not* government agents and that the information was simply to assist with the development of a local agro-business project seemed to go down well; and my project colleague confirmed that we would eventually like to buy some charcoal in exchange for talking with her.


Partway through the discussions as she warmed to us she confirmed her original suspicions of the interpreter as a government man, but had been unable to place the *farangi* who was accompanying him. Sure, each week there were a handful of tourists in the marketplace, for Harar with its heritage and >100 mosques is reputedly the fourth most holy city in the Islamic world and, further, many people were there to see the hyena feeding activities of an evening just outside the city wall, and the majority of these were *farangi*. The charcoal seller was not on their routine visiting lists, however, and she had never actually spoken to a *farangi* before today - the novelty was entertaining.


#### **Business is making money where you can**

After we had shared names, families, places and our thoughts on local sales of the narcotic leaf 'khatt' (*Catha edulis*) – which was dominating this part of the market - we were able to persuade the woman to talk about her charcoal business. As we spoke the cars continued to queue across the square lining up with the traders selling bundles of fresh leaf from their stalls, and loading them in bulk into the back of the vehicles. Business was brisk and never-ending; and indicative of the dominance of this crop for local agriculture in the area.

Like Yemen just across the Red Sea, the cultural challenges of the region have

(continued on page 8)

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(continued from page 6)

distilled into demands for this social narcotic that has shifted out of the traditional local community of mainly young Muslim men as an end-of-day social activity; and have embraced the whole country, crossed the gender and religion gaps and become acceptable for any time of day – and sometimes all day use. Society folds in on itself with the poverty of the masses dominated by the national, regional and international traders who dictate the direction of this industry. Fresh leaf is air-shipped daily to centres in the Middle East, Europe and further afield and the country earns millions of dollars as a result; none of which filtered back directly to the woman selling charcoal.

Counting the cars, estimating the amounts of leaf taken per car and, rather more carefully, asking for prices (without asking directly, and without a *farangi* in tow), we were able to determine wholesale earnings

of the order US\$800/trader/day.

There were similar findings with small-scale retailing. A small bunch of fresh khatt leaves estimated at a kilo or less sold for 60-80 US cents equivalent, and the typical small trader sold 150 bunches each morning (*khatt is best chewed fresh*); thus providing an income of the order of US\$100 or more per day. Like car transport wholesaling, chatt retail trading was buoyant and there were large numbers of sellers and buyers milling around, with large quantities of really grubby bank notes changing hands.

#### **Education helps people to escape poverty**

The charcoal woman had originally shared the market stall as a child with her mother, but the mother had eventually become too old to trade and had died many years back, and the woman had continued the business into her own middle age. She said that she had been selling charcoal in the same



*Seed traders. The survey encompassed seeds, with numerous open sacks displaying a multitude of colours available to the passing trade.*





*Open country. Green and pleasant hill country around the town when seen from high, with much of the ancient city still enclosed by a Sixteenth century wall.*

market for more than 40 years, and had occupied her present site for 17 years. Watching the interpreter we exchanged glances, and you could see the sadness in his face that was later confirmed as we reflected on the woman and her life, after we had left her.

Working for the project the interpreter (whose main duty was driving one of two project vehicles) earned of the order US\$1,000 each month, and was investing it largely in the education of his children. Two daughters were at university in the capital city. In a country listed at position #157 on the HDI scale (listing 169 countries worldwide) and with a GDP per capita of the order of US\$325 (the seventh poorest in SSA) the interpreter was fortunate and well-placed with his languages, driving skills and personal networks within the international agencies. The charcoal woman and her family, by contrast, would never escape their poverty.

#### **Making money from charcoal**

You do not make much money from charcoal production, notwithstanding the heritage nature of this local industry, its role and importance as a source of energy for cooking (and particularly for coffee making in traditional society) and the many people involved with production and trade. Across the country charcoal production remains well-entrenched, and the remnants of indigenous tree cover continue to be removed as impoverished people everywhere exploit the last of their native forests, and the environment degrades further; and yet the country remains a major exporter of charcoal in international markets. *(Think about this as you barbeque those hamburger steaks in the garden or on the veranda next Saturday; what a crazy set-up.)*

Notwithstanding the exposed display of the charcoal on sale, most people bought their charcoal in a small plastic bag.

Estimated at one kilo content, a bag of charcoal sold for 12 US cents *equivalent*. People generally preferred the convenience of the plastic bag, with the charcoal wrapped tightly and less susceptible to damage when carried. The woman trader purchased a large plastic or hessian sack of charcoal from local traders and paid US\$5 for estimated 50 kg content. From this it was easy to work out the margins. Purchased at 10 US cents/kilo and sold at 12 US cents; profit was 2 US cents/kilo or US\$1/sack. She sold her original sack of charcoal over a period of three weeks, providing an income 4-5 US cents/day. The empty sack was returned to the trader.

#### **Making money from everything else**

A life spent earning up to 40 US cents/week or US\$20/year raises issues of human dignity, but the choices in poor communities may be few. Of the many traders in the market, nothing compared to the margins made by the khatt wholesalers and retailers.

For example, each day the egg seller made 50 cents, garlic seller 4 cents, onion seller 2-2.5 cents, potato seller 3 cents, shelled groundnut seller 60 cents and, the lowest income, from the fuel wood seller was just 1-1.5 cents. It was not easy to shift to more profitable lines either – the market was fairly rigid with licensing/stalls, but the orange seller made US\$2/day and the woman selling her regular five live eating birds each day made US\$3. Hire out your donkey for the day, however, and you could earn up to US\$5, but you had to watch how she was treated by the hirer (and not beaten or over-loaded).

As for the woman charcoal seller – the main feature of the story and a reflection on her poverty in a dusty market in an isolated town in the poorest country in Africa – well, she did rather well that day; for we bought her a bag of charcoal which meant every kilo sold and every cent equivalent earned would be clear profit.

She had to promise, however, not to tell anyone until we had long gone. There was no way we could do the same with everyone in the market that we had spoken to that day. The driver, of course, was the ultimate beneficiary of all the small quantities of vegetables, fruits and eggs that we did buy each day, however, and the US\$10 or so spent would make a reasonable impact on the many small traders met each day.

We had *not* done the same with the chatt traders (well aware that we could fill the car and double, triple and/or quadruple our money in the capital city). This thing about trading, of course (whatever you trade) you need to know your markets before testing the temperature of the waters. *Newcomers tend to get their fingers badly burned.*

Earnings as shown were low, and there was a considerable gap between basic food stuffs and the social narcotic leaf but the market, town and people, although poor, were not in abject poverty for this was a community with everyone living within small margins; and thus the inherent risks of generalizing. A base level of living on ‘one dollar a day’ was once widely quoted (and has now risen with inflation up to ‘two dollars a day’ or thereabouts) but this belies context, environment and the financial reality of local networks; it imposes comparisons with western values (where ‘one dollar/day’ represents impossible poverty and a more reasonable figure is US\$10/day).

Whatever the choices and parameters established by the economic models involved – all of which are beyond our focus charcoal seller in Harar – it was the woman herself – her poverty, charisma and charm, situation and quality of life - who has remained visible over the years in the mind’s eye of this particular market survey ■



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## AGS colleagues pay tribute to Åke Olofsson



Åke's life was cut short when he died after a short illness in a Rome hospital on Saturday 28 May, just a few months short of his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday.

All of us have different memories of our multi-talented friend with his quiet, courteous demeanour and tall, slender physique. For some he was a splendid and fearless skier, a master of the toughest runs in the Alps. For others, a jogging partner who would run much slower than his natural speed just to keep his running partners company. For the musically minded his soaring tenor was a joy to hear. Those who attended an important rural finance meeting in the Philippines in 1995 have vivid memories of him leaving everyone spellbound during one evening of Karaoke, with an unaccompanied rendition of Leoncavallo's song, "La Mattinata". For those of artistic bent he was an appreciative and knowledgeable critic, while his

extraordinary linguistic abilities not only made him a valuable work colleague, they also meant he had a wide circle of friends from many different countries and backgrounds.

As an FAO Officer he was known for his common sense, his open and enquiring mind and his reliability. He was an expert in rural finance and gradually expanded his technical interests to agricultural insurance. In this field, too, he built an international reputation and became well-known as a realistic and informed adviser. His sound judgment, extremely meticulous approach and impartiality were recognized by all. Consequently he was requested to serve on the Professional Staff Selection Committee. He discharged this role enthusiastically, critically and responsibly for many years. He also played an important role as a committee and board member for FAO's Credit Union.

For all people who got to know him, he was a particularly amiable person, with a remarkable sense of humour, easy-going, a perfect companion to spend time with, to work with and to travel with. Many people were struck by Åke's genuine kind and caring nature, always there to help a friend in need. Whether watering a garden or feeding a cat, or simply listening and sharing life's ups and downs, Åke was a loyal friend with a big heart. A rare individual who accepted unconditionally and supported fervently, always putting the interests of those he loved ahead of his own.

We have all been touched by Åke in many ways. We treasure the memory of one who was both a valued colleague and trusted friend. His influence on our lives will remain with us forever.

A Memorial Service was held on Thursday, 9 June at 14:00 in the German Lutheran Church located on Via Toscana #7.

**AGS Colleagues and friends**

## Megaliths, Romans, Wine: the Secrets of Portugal

*Tony Grey*

At the northern end of Portugal the provinces of Porto, Minho and Tras-os-Monte stretch from the Atlantic shore to Spain's province of Galicia. This hilly landscape deeply cut by rivers and streams ranges from verdant green vineyards and fields to austere and rocky regions with hidden valleys and villages. The Parque Nacional da Peneda displays a spartan, stony and scrubby landscape cut by ancient dry stone walls and dotted with prehistoric megalithic passage tombs.

To the south the city of Porto (from the Roman *Portus*) lies at the mouth of the River Douro. On the Gaia bank of the river are located famous Port wine lodges where grape juice from upriver vineyards is converted into the famous sweet dessert wine. The fermentation process is halted by the addition of brandy so that some of the grape sugars remain. The grape juice was

once taken by boats to Porto, but today tanker trucks are used. The Port lodges were founded by British entrepreneurs as early as 1790 to circumvent bans on importing French wine as revealed by names like Dow, Taylor, Sandeman and Cockburn.

Northern Portugal boasts a number of beautiful historic towns and churches. Barcelos is a market town with a famously large open-air market. The town is overlooked by the Bom Jesus church of Braga accessible to the fit and devout by a formidable range of steps (or by road for the rest). Viana da Castelo with its traditional houses with wrought iron lamps and balconies has a street market and dancers accompanied by musicians, and an imposing iron monument to the end of the Salazar dictatorship showing the breaking of chains.



*Folk dancing at Viana da Castelo*

Valenca is a fortress town on the Galician border with narrow side streets and imposing Seventeenth-century fortifications inspired by the famous French military architect Vauban. At Ponte de Lima a mainly Fourteenth-century bridge spans

only to remember their sins.

As if the stunning landscape and history were not enough the visitor should relax in one of the numerous traditional cafes. What could be finer than enjoying a double



*Time warp: a Roman regiment prepares to cross the bridge at Ponte de Lima*

the Lima River largely replacing the former Roman bridge. Legend has it that a Roman regiment believing the waterway to be the River Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, crossed under their commander's orders

espresso, cheroot and traditional *pasties de nata* (custard tart with crisp pastry) and watch life go by. Those who love Europe cannot afford to miss this corner of Iberia ■



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## **AFRAM celebrates the Africa Week 2011 Developing people's awareness of Africa's resources and rich culture**

*by Simplicie Ngathe - President, AFRAM*



The United Nations African Amicale “AFRAM” is an amicale of African staff members of the United Nations’ Rome-based agencies.

AFRAM has as its main objectives to promote friendship and solidarity among its members and any other individual or entity sharing its values.

The Amicale’s major event of the year is the Africa Week; it represents a great opportunity to raise awareness on the African continent.

Under the chairmanship of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Chair Country of the African Union, this year’s edition, held 23-27 May 2011 benefited from the usual appreciated support of African Ambassadors.

The activities were officially launched on 23 May 2011 by a successful Inaugural Conference at 12.30 hrs in the Iran Room on

the theme:

*“African forest resources: lessons from the past 50 years of independence and opportunities for the future”,* with the participation of a great number of Permanent Representatives and UN Rome-based agencies staff members. The panel of the Conference was composed as follows: His Excellency Mamadou Dekamo Kamara, Ambassador of the Republic of Congo and Dean of Ambassadors; Her Excellency Cecilia Obono Ndong, Ambassador of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Chair Country of the African Union; His Excellency Crisantos Obama Ondo, Ambassador of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to FAO; Dr Modibo Traoré, Assistant Director-General, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department of FAO; Mr Simplicie Ngathe, AFRAM President Ms Faty Haidara, UNWG Africa-Group President and Mr Dan Rugabira, Inaugural Conference Coordinator.

(continued on page 18)



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(continued from page 16)

**Coordinator:**

The whole Africa Week 2011 has been marked by different cultural events to raise awareness on African resources and rich culture such as: the exhibition of African handicraft, paintings, sculptures and outfits, as well as the presentation of films, documentaries and music in several places inside FAO premises.

The Africa Week 2011 was closed by a Dinner Dance at the FAO Cafeteria. The event hosted a considerable number of guests: Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives, Rome-based agencies and embassies staff; and was highly honored by the noticeable presence of Dr Jacques Diouf, FAO Director-General and Madame.

Thanks to the contribution of all participants and as officially announced by the AFRAM President, four developmental projects were identified and selected. These projects will be funded and implemented with immediate effect in the following

countries of the continent.

Côte d'Ivoire - *Production de vivriers pour la sécurité et la lutte contre la pauvreté par les jeunes de Zouan-Hounien*, Main activities: Food and seed production (rice) and commercialization.

Mali - *Centre éducatif préscolaire, village de Fandrakotra Tsarahonenana, à 25 km de la capitatananari*, Buts de l'association Taniketsako, Alphabétisation des enfants et alphabétisation fonctionnelle des parents. Promotion des droits de l'enfant.

Malawi - *Nansangwa community based child center and support nursery school*. Goals and objectives: The main objective is to address the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual needs of children, especially orphaned children through existing social structures in accordance with the Ministry of Women and Child Development's Action Plan to scale up the quality of community-based childcare. To strengthen family and community capacity to care for OVC.

Madagascar - *Fabrication artisanale de*





*l'encens, Yirimajo, Bamako-Mali.* Objectif principal du projet: Promouvoir l'émancipation de la femme en renforçant sa capacité financière par le biais des activités génératrices de revenus dans ce present projet, cette promotion se fera à travers la fabrication et la revente de l'encens.

For further details, please visit our facebook

page: UN Afram. Special tribute should also be paid to African Ambassadors, Mme Diouf, as well as all those who contributed to the organization of the event, all sponsors and participants for their generosity and contribution. See you all at the 2012 edition of the Africa Week!

## **FAO STAFF COOP 2011 ESSAY COMPETITION ON THE FAO WORLD FOOD DAY THEME “FOOD PRICES – FROM CRISIS TO STABILITY”**

Further to our earlier announcement in the May 2011 Issue of the FAO Casa Gazette, we now provide the Background Information on this year’s World Food Day theme prepared by the WFD Coordinating Unit. The rules of the Essay Competition are reprinted at the end of this article. The FAO Staff Coop will provide each FAO Representation with the official newsletters and relevant information in the official languages, as soon as available, for distribution to the secondary schools in each Member Country.

### **Food prices – from crisis to stability**

Between 2005 and 2008, the world’s staple food prices soared to their highest levels in 30 years. During the last 18 months of that period, maize price increased by 74 percent while that of rice almost tripled, climbing a whole 166 percent.

Food riots broke out in more than 20 countries. Editorialists decreed the end of cheap food. But then, after peaking in June 2008, prices slumped again – falling 33 percent in six months – largely as a vast financial and banking crisis threw the global economy into recession.

The downturn was short-lived, however. In 2010 grain prices shot up 50 percent and continued to soar into 2011 before starting to dip somewhat in the second quarter of 2011. And at that point what would happen next was very much an open question.

Economists believed, however, that the kind of price roller-coasters experienced since 2006 are likely to recur in the coming years. In other words food price volatility – the technical term for the phenomenon – has probably come to stay.

That is not good news. Price swings, upswings in particular, represent a major threat to food security in developing countries. Hardest-hit are the poor. According to the World Bank, in 2010-2011 rising food costs pushed nearly 70 million people into extreme poverty.

“Food prices – from crisis to stability” has been chosen as this year’s World Food Day theme to shed some light on this trend and what can be done to mitigate its impact on the most vulnerable.

At the level of net food importing countries, price spikes can hurt poor countries by making it much more expensive for them to import food for their people. In 2010 the world’s Low Income Food Deficit Countries (LIFDCs) spent a record US\$164 billion on food imports, representing a rise of 20 percent on the year before.

At the level of individuals, people living on less than US\$1.25 a day may need to skip a meal when food prices rise. Farmers are hurt too because they badly need to know the price their crops are going to fetch at harvest time, months away. If high prices are likely they plant more. If low prices are forecast they plant less and cut costs.

Rapid price swings make that calculation much more difficult. Farmers can easily end up producing too much or too little. In stable markets they can make a living. Volatile ones can ruin them while also generally discouraging much-needed investment in agriculture.

Recognizing the major threat that food price swings pose to the world’s poorest countries and people, the international community, led by the G20, moved in 2011 to find ways of

(continued on page 22)



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(continued from page 20)

managing volatility on international food commodity markets. Under the presidency of France's Nicolas Sarkozy, the world's 20 largest economies agreed that any strategy directed to that purpose should have the protection of vulnerable countries and groups as its main priority.

Today's turbulent commodities markets contrast sharply with the situation that characterized the last 25 years of the Twentieth century. Between 1975 and 2000 cereal prices remained substantially stable on a month-to-month basis, although trending downwards over the longer term. For despite rapid population growth – world population doubled between 1960 and 2000 – the Green Revolution launched by Dr Norman Borlaug in the 1960s with the Indian Minister for Agriculture M.S. Swaminathan helped food supply to meet and even exceed demand.

In fact there was, in the Western Hemisphere at least, an over-abundance of food, caused in no small part by the generous subsidies which OECD countries paid to their farmers. But the picture today is a very different one. The global market is tight, with supply struggling to keep pace with demand and stocks are at or near historical lows. It is a delicate balance that can easily be upset by shocks such as droughts or floods in key producing regions.

In order to decide how, and how far, we can manage volatile food prices we need to be clear about why, in the space of a few years, a world food market offering stability and low prices became a turbulent marketplace battered by sudden price spikes and troughs.

The seeds of today's volatility were sown last century when decision-makers failed to grasp that the production boom then enjoyed by many countries might not last forever and that continuing investment was needed in research, technology, equipment and infrastructure.

In the 30 years from 1980 to date the share of official development assistance which OECD countries earmarked for agriculture dropped 43 percent. Continued under-funding of agriculture by rich and poor countries alike is probably the main single cause of the problems we face today.

Contributing to today's tight markets is rapid economic growth in emerging economies, which means more people are eating more meat and dairy produce with the need for feedgrains increasing rapidly as a result. Global trade in soymeal, the world's leading protein feed for animals, has grown 67 percent over the past 10 years.

Population growth, with almost 80 million new mouths to feed every year, is another important element. Population pressure is compounded by the erratic and often extreme meteorological phenomena produced by global warming and climate change.

A further contributing factor may be the recent entry of institutional investors with very large sums of money into food commodity futures markets. There is evidence to suggest that food prices may have surged partly as a result of speculation. But there is considerable debate over the issue.

Lastly, distortive agricultural and protectionist trade policies bear a significant part of the blame. In addition, with agriculture now substantially part of the wider energy market, any shock to the latter – such as unrest in a producing country – can have immediate repercussions on food prices.

Responding to food price volatility therefore involves two different kinds of measures. The first group addresses volatility itself, aiming to reduce price swings through specific interventions while the other seeks to mitigate the negative effects of price swings on countries and individuals.

One measure frequently invoked under the first heading is the setting up of an internationally held food stock able to intervene on markets to stabilize prices. But FAO's view is that such a stock would be of dubious value, as well as expensive and difficult to operate. Also, government intervention in food markets discourages the private sector and hinders competition.

On biofuels, FAO favours abandoning current distortive subsidies and policies or at least making them more flexible and ensuring that bioenergy is produced in the countries and with the crops best suited to such production.

Greater policy coordination in international food trade can reduce volatility by helping maintain an assured flow of goods. FAO supports the multilateral negotiations under the World Trade Organization and the elimination of trade-distorting agricultural subsidies in rich countries. Countries should also agree to refrain from operating export restrictions when their domestic supplies are threatened (as several did in 2007-2008) or adopt reinforced rules on the issue.

On speculation, FAO's research suggests that while this might not trigger price movements, it could exaggerate their size and duration. Authorities in the United States of America and European Union are looking into the possibility of improving the regulatory framework of futures markets. But care must be taken because futures markets play a vital role in offsetting price risk and in price discovery, while investors also bring fresh liquidity into the sector.

More and better information is needed to allow greater transparency in trade on futures markets. This would help ensure that governments and traders make informed decisions and avoid panic or irrational reactions. The efforts made by some countries to address transparency in futures markets are welcome.

As to mitigating the effects of volatility, national or regional safety nets, possibly featuring emergency food reserves, can help assure food supplies to needy and vulnerable population groups during crises. Poor consumers can also be assisted with cash or food vouchers and producers helped with inputs such as fertilizer and seeds.

Market-based mechanisms can help low-income developing countries to meet higher food import bills. At country level, governments can protect themselves from food price increases through a variety of financial arrangements such as call options, which would give them the right to buy food at a set price even months ahead, regardless of how the market has moved in the meantime. At international level, compensatory facilities can help low-income developing countries meet escalating food import bills. Concessional financing facilities such as those provided by the IMF helped countries contend with the balance of payment problems that soaring food prices provoked in 2007-2008.

Ultimately though, stability in the food market depends on increased investment in agriculture, particularly in developing countries, where 98 percent of the hungry live and where food production needs to double by 2050 to feed growing populations.



Investment in infrastructure, marketing systems, extension and communication services, education, as well as in research and development, can increase food supply and improve the functioning of local agricultural markets, resulting in less volatile prices. In this way, markets can work for the poor people who bear the burden of food price volatility.

The level of net investments required is around US\$83 billion a year which would help millions of people around the world escape poverty and help restore long-term stability to agricultural markets.

On World Food Day 2011, let us look seriously at what causes swings in food prices, and do what needs to be done to reduce their impact on the weakest members of global society.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **World Food Day 2011 International Essay Competition for Secondary Schools**

<b>Title/subject:</b>	<b>Food prices - from crisis to stability (WFD 2011 theme)</b>
<b>Launch:</b>	15 May 2011 - First announcement
<b>Deadline for Receipt essays:</b>	31 October 2011
<b>Where:</b>	Secondary schools in FAO Member States and Lazio Region, Italy
<b>Languages:</b>	English, French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Chinese and Russian
<b>Posting of results:</b>	15 December 2011
<b>Age groups:</b>	Two categories: (a) 11 to 14 years and (b) 15 to 18 years
<b>Prizes:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> – US\$ 500 and WFD 2011 bronze medal 2 <sup>nd</sup> – US\$ 400 and WFD 2011 bronze medal 3 <sup>rd</sup> – US\$ 300 and WFD 2011 bronze medal
<b>Consolation prizes:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> – WFD 2011 bronze medal and books to school library 5 <sup>th</sup> – WFD 2011 bronze medal and books to school library 6 <sup>th</sup> – WFD 2011 bronze medal and books to school library
<b>Structure of essays:</b>	500 words maximum Name and surname of students Introduction Body of essay Conclusion with suggestions and/or proposals Essays should be neatly and clearly handwritten or typed Name and complete address of secondary school Date and signature of student at end of essay

**Background material:** FAO WFD 2011 Information and material in the seven languages. **A maximum of 10 essays per category will be accepted from each secondary school participating.** It is therefore important that teachers/schools screen essays and choose the best for submission in the competition. **They should not show marks received. Schools submitting more than 10 per category will be disqualified.**

Commissions will be established to mark and judge the essays in each language and category. The criteria for marking and judging the essays and contents will be the same for all languages and will include: correctness of factual information, innovative suggestions, reporting of data and information on students' home country, grammatical accuracy and respect for number of words (**essays which are excessively long or too short will not be considered**).

## The FAO Staff Artists Corner

### The artistic path of Ms Graziela Segura

by Flavia Carbonetti



*"Revelation"*

(Pastel chalks 1995 – Size cm 100 x 75)

Creativity is a natural gift of the human being and can find millions of ways to express itself. This new space of the FAO Casa Gazette is entirely dedicated to FAO Staff willing to share the gift of art (paintings, pictures, sculptures, etc.) with other UN colleagues. Emotions, dreams and passions can approach all of us and can also help kindle the flame of the sacred fire of creativity. To express and disclose the rich world of emotions we invite colleagues from FAO Headquarters and from all over the world to kindly inform us of their interest to participate in this new space, by writing to the Editor of the FAO Casa Gazette at [jill.stevenson@fao.org](mailto:jill.stevenson@fao.org)

Ms Graziela Segura is our first artist to participate in the "FAO Staff Artists Corner". She was born in Colombia and has been living in Rome since 1982. In 1983 she started to work at FAO Headquarters in the Fisheries Department and actually she works as secretary in the Fishing Operations and Technology Service (FIRO).

***Ms Segura your paintings are gorgeous and nature oriented. We would appreciate very much if you could share with the FAO Casa Gazette readers a little bit more of your art. How did you discover to be an artist and when did you start to paint? When did you do your first painting?***

Very early in my life painting became a passion. I always enjoyed completing school homework assigned by the Art class which obliged me to use watercolours, tempera and oil paints. The death of my mother literally pushed me towards painting. I felt so sad that I decided to create for her a post-mortem tribute. Painting in those

moments helped me to find again serenity and those works of art were a revelation to me! My first painting was of myself and my two brothers, crouched on the ground while painting on the floor.

***Did you follow art classes or are you self-taught?***

As mentioned above, I was very young when I started to try to improve my technical abilities also by visiting galleries and museums. I was particularly interested in the great masters of Impressionism and have always sought to



*"Present"*

(Watercolor 2004 - Size CM: 32 X24)

capture their sense of colour by using small strokes and by working with my fingers which gives to the surface the required texture. Later on I joined art classes at FAO with Marina Hass who helped me to develop a creative approach through the use of "light and shadows" and the sense of the atmosphere. During my artistic path I was lucky enough to meet other great artists. Christopher Elliot taught me the art theory and the various aspects and schools of art while Christian Besemer allowed me to participate in the graphic work of the cover of the FAO publication CERES. Christian was also an authority on the link between painting and photography and this understanding was very useful to me over the years. Then, at a certain point, I decided to dedicate myself more seriously to painting and began to take regular lessons from the Master Dariush Radpour, teacher at the "European Institute of Design". He helped me to develop my abilities and taught me how to use pastels and chalks on large surfaces (100x70 cm) allowing me to give full expression to individual feelings and in a precise, careful and meticulous way. In 1995 his enthusiasm and confidence in my work convinced me to organize an exhibition and thus my first exhibition "Shadows and Reflections" was held in

the FAO Staff Lounge in the Casa Bar. Fortunately, people liked my works of art and this encouraged me to continue (at the time I was signing my paintings with my nickname Tita). I then joined some evening classes organized by Nicolò Caito working with watercolours. His enthusiasm for this technique enabled me to develop a range of colours that was particularly effective and successful in Group Exhibition.

***Ms Segura, what do you want to express with your paintings? What inspires you? What motivates you?***

Cezanne, Monet, Vincent Van Gogh and the other great impressionists fascinate me with their way of painting which is so fresh and simple and their technique which allows them to complete a work of art in a few hours without getting caught up in details. Works that capture the passage of time, the changing light, works full of fascinating and significant colours.

***Who is your preferred artist and why? Have you ever tried to follow his path?***

Yes I have often tried to follow Claude Monet's way of working and to express the same emotions that he provokes.

***Do you paint for pleasure or you wish to become a professional painter?***

My best paintings were done during sad or thoughtful periods but the results obtained gave me such joy that the sadness vanished and I was able to gain insight into myself and the world around me.

***Did you hold exhibitions also outside FAO? Where?***

I should organize more exhibitions but the administrative work involved discourages me and I just prefer to paint. However, as previously outlined I have participated in Group Exhibitions: at the Bottega degli Artisti in Trastevere in Rome and had two personal exhibitions at FAO Headquarters (1995 and 2011), in the Staff Lounge, which in fact were appreciated.

***Ms Segura, what are you working on now and what are your plans for the future?***

Currently I am interested in three-dimensional photography and I am experiencing the magic of this technique with Dariush Radpour, who is a well-known expert in this field. When my stay with FAO will be completed, I would like to have a small space in Rome where I can paint and continue to create. I love art and look forward to working full time not only on painting but also with photography and jewellery.

***Do you have a special message to give to our readers who would like to start painting?***

Although I never completed formal training as an artist I believe that in my studies of "light and



*"Autumn"*  
(Pastel Chalks 1995 – Size cm75x100)

shade” I have been able to convey the emotions felt by an amateur. So my message is brief: If you love art in its various expressions then you can find happiness in working and therefore you can create beautiful things. However, you will often need a guide to help you to find the right path where you will also have the possibility of confrontation with people experiencing your same passion, Art, and to find the right solutions at the right time. Life offers many possibilities. If we learn how to see and use them our vision of the world will be considerably enriched!

***Ms Segura, do you have a web site where we can admire your works of art?***

For those of you interested in my works of art hereunder my web site:  
<http://www.gracielsegura.com>

We would like to thank Ms Graciela Segura for having shared with us her artistic path and her hopes.

To conclude this article, some words from one of the greatest masters of Impressionism:

*“Art can have a considerable influence on our own response to nature. It can enhance our vision, so that we become aware of a new and deeper meaning in what we see around us. Claude Monet”*

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## LA SELVA DI PALIANO

*by Jill Stevenson*



**H**ere I am again to tell you about another of my trips. FAO was closed on 2 June (in lieu of 1 May), so I took the opportunity to visit “La Selva di Paliano” in the province of Frosinone.

I need to give you a little of the history of this bird park as the changes which have taken place over the years are extremely sad but it seems that at last the park has improved and will once again be a place where families can enjoy a day out near Rome in a natural environment.

This bird park of more than 470 hectares was opened in 1974 by Prince Antonello Ruffo di Calabria who wanted to open a park which families could visit to see birds and animals at close quarters and also have a day out, enjoying the wide open spaces where the children could play, in addition to having picnics and barbeques. More than 200 different birds were to be found in the

park, many of which were endangered species, e.g. cranes, flamingos, ostriches, zebras, as well as plants and trees from all over the world.

Unfortunately, due to economic reasons, the park was forced to close. However, just before this, I managed to visit the park once again and was shocked by its condition. The whole area had been neglected and there was rubbish all over the ground. We did manage to see, however, a night heron, a pine marten and many types of water fowl. Some time after that, I heard that poachers had entered the park and had killed all the animals and that the area was to be sold for property development.

I was therefore really pleased to hear that after seven years of oblivion, part of the park had been bought by the Regione Lazio, which has spent a considerable amount of money cleaning up the area. It reopened on

1 May 2010 with many new initiatives for the public .

During my last visit I was pleased to see many families in the picnic area preparing their lunches on the barbeques and children playing and riding their bikes and generally having lots of fun. My sister and I started our walk around the top lakes to see if we could see any birds. The lakes were full of fish and very noisy frogs, but we did not see any water birds at all. We were very disappointed and hope that in time they will come back.

The only two ducks we saw were on the lower lake but we are at a loss as to what species they are (see photograph). I hope that an expert can help me. These look like Mallards, they have the curly Mallard tail, but they have black heads instead of green... any ideas anyone?

The location and contact details of La Selva are: Just off the Via Palianese Sud, Paliano (FR) 06 0775-570837 – 333-3542349. Open on Saturdays, Sundays and official holidays from 9.00 to 19.00. Entrance free of charge ■



## Fish and seafood for the summer

by Edith Mahabir

### Mussels in sauce (Starter)

**Ingredients:**

1 kg mussels  
400 gr ripe tomato pulp (also canned)  
½ glass white wine (optional)  
dried hot pepper (optional)  
10 basil leaves  
bunch parsley, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, crushed  
6 tbsp olive oil  
salt, black pepper



**Method:** Scrape off all crusts and scrub mussels to clean thoroughly. In a very large saucepan or casserole place the mussels with a little water, cover and open them over a high fire – this will take about 4-5 minutes. Remove the top shell of each mussel leaving them in the other shell, and set aside. Discard all those which have not opened as only the live ones open ... Strain the white liquid and reserve it.

In a large casserole heat the oil and fry for 30 seconds the crushed garlic cloves and dried hot pepper; add the chopped tomato pulp, reserved water from mussels and basil and cook together for 5 minutes. Add the mussels, black pepper and a little salt (not too much, taste to verify), stir delicately to incorporate well. Add the white wine if using and simmer for 6-7 minutes over medium heat. By then the wine should have evaporated and the sauce should have thickened. Sprinkle with abundant chopped parsley, and serve immediately. Accompany with bread.

### Fettuccine with courgettes and prawns (First Course)

**Ingredients:**

250 gr fettuccine (egg pasta)  
2 medium courgettes, diced  
5 cherry tomatoes, de-seeded, cut into strips  
150 gr prawns, cleaned (thawed if frozen)  
1 clove garlic, chopped  
1 large spring onion, chopped  
olive oil  
salt, pepper  
saffron (powder or strands)  
parsley, chopped



**Method:** In 5 tbsp olive oil fry together the garlic and onion, add the diced courgettes and cook together for 3 minutes. Then add the prawns, saffron, salt and pepper. Mix well and after 2 minutes add the strips of cherry tomato, continue cooking for 3-4 minutes more.

Cook the fettuccine pasta in abundant salted water, drain well and season with the prepared sauce, complete with freshly ground black pepper and chopped parsley, mix well. Serve immediately.

## Marinated Tuna (Second Course)

### Ingredients

4 slices tuna  
1 onion  
4 salted anchovies (or paste)  
2 tbsps flour  
1 glass dry white wine  
2 lemons  
2 tbsps vinegar  
black pepper  
salt  
olive oil (as needed)



### Method:

Chop half of the onion, add the juice of the lemons, salt and pepper and marinate the tuna slices for about 30 minutes. If using frozen tuna the slices must be completely thawed.

In a large low casserole or heavy frying pan heat enough olive oil and shallow fry the slices of tuna on both sides after having dusted them with the flour (shaking off any excess). Remove delicately the slices of fish and set aside. In the same oil place the remaining half onion sliced together with the chopped anchovies and fry together for a couple minutes over moderate heat. Add the wine and vinegar and cook together over very low heat for 10 minutes. Put back in the slices of fried tuna and cook together for an additional 10 minutes, turning over once. Serve hot, accompanied with potato or pumpkin puree.

## Cocktail Mojito

### Ingredients:

½ tsp sugar  
7.5 ml lime juice  
fresh mint leaves  
fizzy mineral water  
45 ml Havana Club white rum



### Method:

In a big glass or tumbler dissolve the sugar in the lime juice, add the mint leaves and fill with chopped ice. Pour in the white rum and complete with fizzy water. Mix and serve.





## Time after time

There are forms of co-operation that almost become a new tradition

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