

# RURAL DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP NETWORK

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### WOMAN FARMER AN ARTIST IN A TIME OF CRISIS

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Among the one hundred and fifty varieties of vegetables Yuno Farm grows on its 230 acres in Bordentown, New Jersey, farmer Nevia No's current favorites are Asian cucumber and avocado squash. When she says the squash has the "nuttness and creaminess" of avocado, can be eaten raw or sautéed, and "tastes more flavorful than zucchini," it is easy to see how she has become the marketing arm of the Yuno Farm family food growing venture.

Almost as a lark, she gave a few vegetables to a neighbor to sell at a New York City greenmarket seven years ago. Until then, the farm had sold only wholesale to Asian Markets. Now it sells only to farmers markets and high-end restaurants in the city.

As the costs have increased, for seeds, oil to heat its seven greenhouses, fuel for trucks, Yuno has been able to raise its prices. As Ms. No said, "It's not cheap to farm. Unless you know what you're doing, you can get into big trouble."

Farmers around the world have gotten into big trouble over the past few years to the extent of being caught in a world food crisis. Most of the world's farmers are women. Secretary General Ban Ki Mon noted in recent comments that their problems are compounded by discrimination and in many countries they are prevented by law from owning land.

In 1995, in conjunction with the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, nongovernmental organizations from several countries established Rural Women's Day, to be observed on October 15, the day before World Food Day, October 16. As the Women's World Summit Foundation explains on its website, the purpose of the day is to "promote, recognize, and support the efforts, achievements and contributions of rural women around the world... World Rural Women's Day intends to ... bring... rural women out of obscurity at least once a year to remind society how much they owe to rural women and to give value and credit to their work."

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\* A Response to the World Food Crisis: Smallholder Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development in Africa – Meeting at the United Nations, Conference Room 2 9/22/08

The Foundation states that there are at least 1.6 billion rural women in the world, most of whom are farmers. WWSF further states that “women produce on average more than half of all the food that is grown: up to 80 per cent in Africa, 60 per cent in Asia, between 30 and 40 per cent in Latin America and Western countries.” The United States Department of Agriculture Census reports that as of 2002 there were 237,819 women farmers in the United States, 5,138 in New Jersey and 17,796 in New York.

Nevia No spent her early years in Korea, where her mother ran a restaurant featuring free-range chickens that they raised and killed. At the age of thirteen, she was sent to Los Angeles alone with her nine-year-old brother and was in charge of cooking and caring for him from that time on. The years around puberty were hard for her. She went to school, knowing no English, lonely, and questioning her parents’ action.

After graduating from college, studying the performing arts, dance and music, she moved east and opened a modern dance studio in the New York area. She met her husband on a blind date.

Now, in addition to handling all the farm’s marketing, she arranges its planting and is involved in production up until its greenmarket season, which goes from April through December. While the farm is not certified organic, it is 90% pesticide free, is weeded manually, and uses fertilizer made from horse manure, cow manure, and compost donated by the township from its mowing and tree chopping remnants.

Ms. No is the mother of three children. Her husband is a “typical farmer,” immersed in the growing process. Eight men, who come regularly from Mexico each year, provide extra labor. The farm’s name combines the couple’s last names “Yu” and “No.” Had she remained in Korea, she would have become a writer, she believes, but now that won’t happen “in this life.”

When asked if she had thoughts about the World Food Crisis in a time when the globe also faces a financial crises, she responded that she is not a political person, but “I am happy that I am capable of growing my own food. What else is there to worry about? I am thankful that I have acquired such useful knowledge. Wherever I go, if I have a little piece of land, I’ll be fine.”

Starry Krueger

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Starry Krueger is President of the Rural Development Leadership Network

Photo of Nevia No at Union Square Farmers Market 10/10/08

Photo Credit: Starry Krueger

Phone interviews 10/10, 10/11, and 10/13/08