

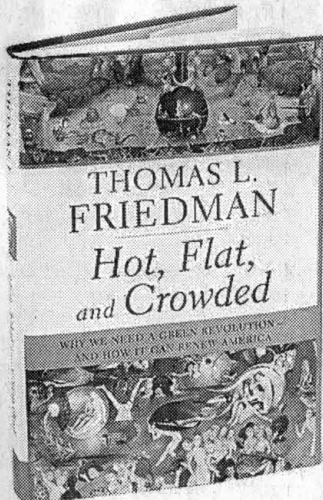
Two views on the future of food

THERE HAS BEEN an ongoing debate in the food world for some time regarding technology and the future. Do we look to the future or to the past for sustainable food solutions? Will technology offer the solutions we need in the coming decades, or can we find the answers in traditional methods and heirloom seed types?

To help us sort it all out, there are two new books that offer both complementary and contrasting perspectives on these questions.

"You can grow more food per acre. All it takes is knowledge," writes Thomas L. Friedman in his new best seller, "Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution — and How It Can Renew America."

The book is a rousing call for what Friedman, a business and political columnist, terms Code Green; a far-reaching shift in national priorities toward conservation and sustainability. His terminology is an implicit take on the post-9/11 terrorist alert colors Code Red and Code Orange — he literally begins with the 9/11 attacks and uses the context of war to frame the current environmental situation.



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Also using the connection between food and war — yet in a completely different way — is Gary Paul Nabhan, recipient of a MacArthur "genius" award and a professor of geology at the University of Arizona.

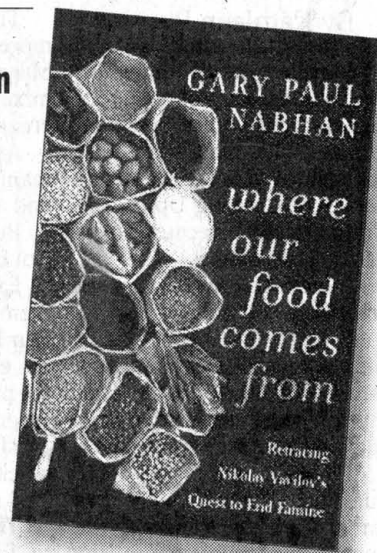
Nabhan's new book, "Where Our Food Comes From," chronicles the life of Russian botanist Nikolai Vavilov, who devoted his life to discovering the centers of origin of our food crops in an effort to combat hunger and famine. Ironically, Vavilov became caught up in the politics of World War II and ended up dying in prison of malnutrition.

While Nabhan and Friedman come from widely different perspectives, they agree on many points. Central to both books is a call for the increased protection of biodiversity, which both authors appreciate as natural treasures.

Nabhan champions Vavilov's belief that biodiversity hot spots fostered the growth of ancient civilizations through the concentration of food, allowing humans to become what we are today. Unfortunately, today's food systems — and our personal food habits — have all but quashed natural biodiversity.

Friedman points out that while global food companies such as Wal-Mart, Starbucks and McDonald's have been

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entering into collaborations with conservation groups, these efforts are too little and too late.

This leads to a point of disagreement between these two authors. Friedman believes that continued globalization is the inevitable future, and urges Americans to be at the forefront of the burgeoning green technology revolution, which he claims will lead to solutions for many of these problems.

Nabhan, in contrast, looks to the past for answers. One of his many projects is the Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT) Alliance, a community of chefs, ecologists, farmers, fishers, agricultural historians and ranchers dedicated to restoring and celebrating the diversity of time-honored food traditions.

One of the fundamental ideas of the RAFT project is a return to regional food systems. Each food region has particular ecological and social customs that come together culturally through our

food. Nabhan believes that many of the solutions to our environmental problems lie in these local food traditions.

Leigh Belanger of the Chefs Collaborative, a RAFT partner, explains that it's easy to get overwhelmed when you look at the big picture, but regional food systems are going to start making more sense as the global environmental condition declines.

Belanger thinks that looking to the past for answers simply makes sense. We don't have to be nostalgic, Belanger continues, but sometimes nostalgia can be a great vehicle to bring people into the conversation. And the larger the conversation, the greater the possibility for change.

As a pair, Friedman and Nabhan's latest books offer two compelling views of the future potential for a healthy food system for us all.

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