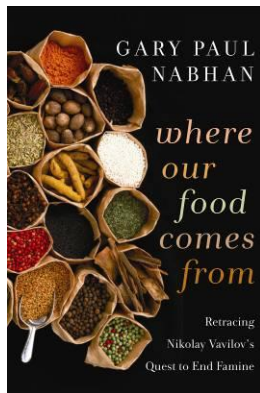




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CONTACT Jaime Jennings, 202-232-7933x44  
EMAIL [jjennings@islandpress.org](mailto:jjennings@islandpress.org)  
WEBSITE [www.whereourfoodcomesfrom.org](http://www.whereourfoodcomesfrom.org)



## WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM: Retracing Vavilov's Quest to End Famine by Gary Paul Nabhan

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 2008) — Soaring food prices, shortages, and even riots are signals that we're facing serious limits to our capacity to feed the world. Some experts believe solutions can be found through local and sustainable foods, while others are certain that seed banks hold the promise of tomorrow's food supply.

World-renowned ethnobiologist, conservationist, and author Gary Paul Nabhan believes the missing link is getting seeds out of storage and into the hands of local, traditional farmers in their areas and cultures of origin. In *WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM: Retracing Vavilov's Quest to End Famine* (Island Press, October 6, 2008), Nabhan argues for a new collaborative effort between farmers and scientists.

"We can't have successful strategies for local and sustainable agriculture, or adapt to all the climatic and economic changes we're facing, if we don't have a diversity of seeds and the traditional knowledge of how to experiment with them," he warns. "Tomorrow's food will be found in a field and not a laboratory."

By having a diversity of seeds in the hands of traditional farmers for farm-based breeding, seeds will adapt to the changing climate in a more rapid and resilient way than the world's elite plant breeders can possibly do on their own.

One of the first scientists to recognize the importance of biocultural diversity was the Russian botanist, Nikolay Vavilov. Before being jailed by Stalin as a scapegoat for Russia's famines, Vavilov traveled over five continents, collecting hundreds of thousands of seeds in hopes of ending widespread hunger. In *WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM*, Nabhan retraces Vavilov's extraordinary journey, discovering:

- How Pamir farmers in Tajikistan have created an informal seed and fruit exchange network where they are able to adapt their diverse crop varieties in response to dramatically shifting climate changes;
- How people in the Sierra Madre are attempting to preserve their plant and cultural traditions in the face of logging and drug interests;
- Italy's Po Valley, the site of some of the most sophisticated and diverse irrigation agriculture in Europe, is in danger because of drought, overextended water reserves, and a deteriorated infrastructure;
- In Lebanon, a group of farmers, activists, and food writers organized the first authentically local farmers' market in nearly a century;
- In Kazakhstan, how wild apples may be the key to the country's food security.

Through discussions with local farmers, visits to outdoor markets, and comparing his observations in eleven countries to Vavilov's journals and photos from decades ago, Nabhan reveals just how much we've already lost and how resilient farmers and scientists are working together to save the food supplies of our world. He concludes that we urgently need grass roots involvement and investment in the traditional ecological knowledge of local farmers.

"At Island Press, we are focused on issues of food security and human well being and Gary Nabhan's book and photo exhibit extend the discussion and understanding of these subjects," said Charles C. Savitt, president and publisher of the nonprofit organization.

Gary Paul Nabhan is a world-renowned ethnobiologist, conservationist, and essayist. The author of *Why Some Like It Hot*, *Coming Home to Eat*, and many other books and articles, he has been honored with a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and The John Burroughs Medal for nature writing. Founder and facilitator of the Renewing America's Food Traditions collaborative, he is currently a Research Social Scientist at the Southwest Center at the University of Arizona. See [www.garynabhan.com](http://www.garynabhan.com) to track his lecture and photo exhibit schedules.

**WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM:**

By Gary Paul Nabhan

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Founded in 1984, Island Press works to stimulate, shape, and communicate the information that is essential for solving environmental problems. Today, with more than 800 titles and some 40 new releases each year, it is the nation's leading publisher of books on environmental issues. But Island Press does more than publish books. It advances environmental science by nurturing the exchange of ideas across disciplines and sectors, and by helping to create a multidisciplinary literature on environmental problems and solutions. The knowledge created is spread far beyond the range of a limited marketplace through sophisticated communications initiatives that reach journalists, academics, policymakers, practitioners and the general public. Through these efforts, Island Press is driving change by moving ideas from the printed page to public discourse and practice. Island Press's emphasis is, and will continue to be, on transforming objective information into understanding and action. For more information and further updates be sure to check out our blogs and podcasts at [www.islandpress.org](http://www.islandpress.org).

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