

After the fires—now what?

By Brenda L. Marder

Thanasis Giamoustouris, Farm Director at the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, commenting on the regeneration of farmland and forest in Greece says that, "whatever is done must be accomplished by educated people". Giamoustouris took his doctoral degree in plant genetics at the John Innes Centre of the University of East Anglia, UK. At this moment, the Ministry of Agriculture and experts from the universities are embarking on surveys to determine remedies for the thousands of acres that have been devoured by the wild fires of this past summer.

Until this is completed, funds offered by the government for reconstruction will be limited. These experts will give guidelines to people who will put them into practice. However, Giamoustouris's hope is that "educated populations, especially the youth of Greece, who have studied at farm schools and universities, will refer to these guidelines and implement them, when restoring the land." He expects that in the long run, farmers will not simply replace the animals and crops just as they were before, but find ways to improve on quality, keeping in mind the environmental principles they learned during their educational process. Those farmers who are not educated in soil and plant regeneration, he assumes, will be guided by the Ministry and schools to use environmentally beneficial means.



American Farm School students plant trees every year as part of their environmental educational program.

Specifically, he claims, "as far as the forests are concerned, most of them will regenerate on their own." But lands under cultivation, especially olive groves and vineyards, key economic areas for farmers and the country's

economy, of course, present difficult problems, since olive trees require decades to reach maturity. "A serious problem at this point is recommending new crops to farmers. Such advice is not a good idea at this moment since people are trying merely to survive and beginning new projects would present them with insurmountable difficulties."

Giamoustouris is concerned with the sociological ramifications caused by the destructive fires. "Unless proper aid and advice is given to farmers quickly, young people will emigrate, abandoning their farms, and head for the cities or abroad." He is especially concerned about young people, since his life's work has been devoted to training young men and women at the Farm School to care for the land. Of the 3,000 American Farm School graduates living in Greece, sixty percent live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture or related businesses. Students enroll each year from approximately 150 different villages scattered across every geographical region of Greece. The School stresses environmental protocol both in the classroom and practical training.

Recently, American Farm School President William McGrew has offered full scholarships, to include room and board, to youngsters in Greece who have lost their homes and who have seen their land and schools destroyed by the fires.