



## **Mindi Schneider**

**Schoolhouse Fellow April 2011**



Mindi Schneider is a political sociologist who is a doctoral student at Cornell University. During her residency at The Schoolhouse she will be working on her dissertation.

Here is Ms. Schneider's own description of her background and research aims:

I've been working in agriculture for about 15 years, first with my BS in Horticulture and subsequent jobs in the field, and then in my graduate work. I did an MS in Agronomy with a focus on Agroecology, and my thesis was a study of "Local Foods and Land Ethics". It was one part feasibility study to see what the opportunities and challenges were for establishing more local food production and consumption in an urbanizing county in eastern Nebraska (my home state), and one part survey of links between different paradigms about human-nature relations and forms of agricultural production.

I then shifted focus to studying agricultural issues through the lenses of political economy and sociology at the PhD level, and to working on agricultural development in China. I spent a year in an intensive Mandarin program both at Cornell and at Beida to get my language to an intermediate/advanced level, and I've been in China for close to 2 years altogether.

I'm currently working on a Fulbright Hays fellowship while I conduct research for my dissertation. The project has two main goals. First, I want to understand the political and economic context within which the swine sector in particular is being restructured. For this, I spent 5 months in Beijing where I interviewed policy experts in various universities, bureaus, and organizations. I have continued to work on this question, looking at policies and markets in pig genetics, pig feed, and pig production models and technologies.

Two themes that run through my analysis is the role of agribusiness (domestic, foreign, and transnational) and market logics in shaping China's emerging model of agricultural development, and the social and ecological implications of the new model. My second goal is to assess the opportunities, challenges, and needs of small-holder farmers in the wake of the commercialization and industrialization of pig farming.

I am currently in Chengdu, working through the Sichuan Agricultural University to get at these questions. I've spent time in villages with smallholders to try to better understand their production systems, their livelihoods, and the changes and displacements that are taking place. I'm currently in the thick of this part of the study, and when I finish, hope to contribute an empirically grounded account of contemporary agrarian change that can be useful to researchers and policy makers.