



The Furrow

Newsletter of Oregon Rural Action

Sowing Seeds of Change

June 2003

Volume 2, Number 1

Calendar

The Farm Bill & Organics: Workshop for farmers and ranchers to learn more about the new farm bill

OSU Extension Office
710 SW 5th Avenue
Ontario, OR ... June 28, 9AM - noon

SolWest Renewable Energy Fair
John Day July 25-27

NW Renewable Energy Festival
Walla Walla September 19-21

Principles of Community Organizing Training
Billings, MT July 12-15
Rapid City, SD October 4-7

Baker Country Grassroots Alliance will meet next on Wednesday, June 25th at 7:00pm in the basement of St. Stephens Episcopal Church at 2177 First St. in Baker City. Regular chapter meetings are the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm at the Baker County Library or St. Stephens.

The **Blue Mountain Chapter** has suspended meetings for the summer and will re-convene on the second Tuesday of September (Sept. 9) with a full membership meeting to establish the chapter's goals and objectives for 2003-04. Regular chapter meetings are the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm in the Misener Conference Room at the County Annex, 1001 Fourth St. in La Grande.

The **Snake River Chapter** meets the 2nd Monday of each month at 6:00 for potluck/snacks and 6:30 for the meeting at the AFSCME Union Hall, 463 S Park, Ontario.

NEW CHAPTER FORMS

BAKER COUNTY GRASSROOTS ALLIANCE

On May 8th, Oregon Rural Action welcomed its newest chapter, Baker County Grassroots Alliance. Nearly 25 people turned out at the Senior Center in Baker City to talk about local issues, including enforcement of the county's land use planning laws, the local electric utility's reconnect policy, sidewalks as a public safety issue, noxious weeds, local energy production, closure of the county's landfill, and the need to promote more recycling. Several members took on initial leadership positions: Timothy Keneipp as chair, Roxanna Swann as secretary, and Alice Lentz as treasurer.



The new chapter has developed a mission statement: Baker County Grassroots Alliance is a diverse rural organization that embraces democracy, social justice and supports safe food, family farms, stewardship of our natural resources and wise land use planning to create healthy sustainable communities. Baker County Grassroots Alliance works with public and private groups to take action on local issues from a position of honor and respect, valuing tradition and change, while seeking common ground on issues.

In subsequent meetings, chapter members picked the first issue that the group will tackle: pushing for more public involvement in the process to develop a countywide plan for solid waste management, addressing the prospect of the existing landfill closing within the next 10 years. Members would like to see improved recycling, more information and facilities for composting, and serious consideration of alternatives for waste disposal. Baker County Grassroots Alliance will meet next on Wednesday, June 25th at 7:00pm in the basement of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (2177 First St. in Baker City). For more information, call Timothy Keneipp at 377-3229 (cell).

LOCAL FOOD & FOOD SAFETY

At a late April meeting, sixteen ORA members from across the region sorted through a list of concerns related to local food and food safety, with the goal of picking one ORA-wide food issue for members to work on in the next year. Four topic areas were prioritized for further consideration: Farmers Markets, Genetically Engineered foods, establishing a Local Processing Plant, and Labeling & the Consumer's Right to Know. We are proposing a follow-up Food meeting on Saturday, September 20th to finalize this discussion, pick an issue, and develop a campaign strategy for 2003-04. If you would like to be part of the decision making and campaign planning, contact the ORA office.



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ENERGY TEAM TAILGATES FOR LOCAL GREEN POWER

Raffle-eager attendees arriving at the 2003 OTEC (the regional electric utility) Annual Meeting in La Grande on May 10th got a look at the first Blue Mountain Energy Team Tailgate Party promoting local green power. Braving a fierce wind (appropriate!) that would have frustrated even the best banner-hangers, a crew of Energy Team members set up shop outside the main entrance to the Blue Mountain Armory and offered coffee, treats, and information about renewable energy to all who passed by.

The outreach effort was to publicize the Team's current goal: converting OTEC's existing Green Power program which offers the utility's customers the option to pay extra for the environmental benefits of electricity generated by a large wind farm in Wyoming into a fund for local renewable projects. The Team's idea modeled on the SNAP program (Sustainable, Natural, Alternative Power) of the Chelan People's Utility District in Washington state is to have OTEC collect Green Power money and distribute it annually to folks generating electricity with approved renewable systems

(such as wind turbines or photo-voltaic solar panels) connected to the electrical grid in the OTEC service area. With this type of program, the incentive for installing renewable systems is much greater and will enable local consumer-generators to pay for their systems much more quickly (a few years rather than a few decades) than under the current net metering arrangement.

The Energy Team is researching other utilities' Green Power programs and pulling together a SNAP-type proposal for OTEC. Potential actions for the campaign include gathering endorsements from local officials and businesspeople, collecting petition signatures of OTEC customers in support of the idea, and arranging a SNAP presentation to the OTEC Board by the Chelan PUD. The OTEC Board's decision about renewing the current big wind Green Power program is likely to occur by late summer, so we have about two months to make an impact. If you are interested and want to help out, contact Chuck Koch (437-2344) or Brett in the ORA office (975-2411).



Photo by Brett Kelter

RENEWABLE ENERGY FAIR IN JULY

The 2003 SolWest Renewable Energy Fair is set for the last weekend in July (July 25-27) at the Grant County Fairgrounds in John Day. This annual event draws nearly 2000 people and offers a variety of informative and timely workshops, exhibits, and events related to alternative energy and energy conservation. Past workshop topics have included: passive solar home construction, wind power generation, solar water heating, energy efficiency, alternative-fuel vehicles, and more. For a full schedule of events, check out the SolWest website <www.solwest.org> or contact the ORA office.