



# The Furrow

Newsletter of Oregon Rural Action

Sowing Seeds of Change

December, 2005

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## What We'd Love to See: Thriving Communities

---Colin Mathewson, Organizer Blue Mountain Chapter

Imagine walking into a store lined with the valley's freshest produce, flowers, eggs, locally grown and processed beef, and locally canned goods. Local artisan soap and honey is for sale under local artists' paintings hung on the walls. A brightly decorated board advertises your neighbors' childcare, graphic design, and plumbing services.

### Calendar

**Baker County Grassroots Alliance** will meet Tuesday, December 13th at Mad Matildas to plan for 2006.

The **Blue Mountain Chapter** will meet again in March. Join us to work on the current issues -- see newsletter.

The **Snake River Chapter** is planning to hold their Annual Meeting in December.

**Wallowa County** residents: there is a small but steady group of Oregon Rural Action members living in Wallowa County meeting on a regular basis. For information, call Dave Bishop 426-3033.

Driving through the valley, you notice that the fields appear different. Varied crops. Movement and color. A school bus unloads children eager to learn how grass-fed cattle are raised, how biodiesel is made, how they can become farmers. You pass an occasional windmill sweeping energy from the air.

Volunteers, young and old alike, college students some, arrange for music and dancing amid cooking demonstrations at the Farmer's Market, which is also the weekly pick-up point for food bank clients. Our elected officials and local electric cooperative invest in local ideas and energy to cultivate the family-wage jobs that will employ our children. Our local businesses thrive, and the now-empty Wal-Mart building is the Union County Arts and Cultural Center.

On November 14, sixteen Blue Mountain Chapter members met with Oregon Rural Action staff to brainstorm our next campaign directions, and the visions that will inspire and sustain us through the work ahead. Under the broad goal of building thriving local communities, we outlined goals in three vital areas of community life: food, economy, and energy.

**Economy.** We will strive to support the livelihoods of local artisans, entrepreneurs, and established business owners. One first step will be to partner with Union County Tourism, the Union County Chamber of Commerce, and local downtown development associations to organize a sustainable Buy Local campaign to encourage and educate residents to support their local businesses. At the same time, we will begin meeting with local artisans and entrepreneurs to explore the concept of a local arts and services cooperative that could serve as a central storefront for locally produced goods and services.

**Energy.** Our goal on energy will sound familiar: to facilitate the local generation of renewable energy available for local purchase. Our first step will be to help establish a Union County Renewable Energy Committee, whose members would be appointed by the county commissioners to advise the commission on issues related to the economic development potential of renewable energy in the county. We will also recruit candidates for open OTEC board seats in Union, Baker, and Grant counties while drafting an amendment to the cooperative's bylaws to allow for each county to elect their OTEC representatives directly. Such an amendment would open the closed doors to the directors' boardroom, currently filled with handpicked successors who have won as "incumbents" in every single election they have run. (Continued on Page 3)

You may remember a letter to Oregon Rural Action members last January that was straightforward about the financial crisis at Oregon Rural Action.

It is with great pleasure that I can now write to our members to let you know that due to the diligent work and careful planning of the staff and Board, the situation for this organization has substantially improved!!

Over the past ten months, we have talked directly to many members, listening carefully to their suggestions about their interests, willingness to contribute time and energy, and their ideas for how Oregon Rural Action could approach our work. As a result, the Board and staff made decisions to reframe our message and our activity: instead of waiting for an "issue" to arise that we can react to (such as another WalMart Supercenter or Home Depot challenging our local businesses), we are moving forward with a **PROACTIVE AND POSITIVE** approach to community organizing.

The bottom line is that we are now working towards creating the communities of our dreams by spurring partnerships and exerting leadership in building thriving local communities.

In this newsletter you will find articles representing the collective ideas of members and staff. We hope you will join in rebuilding this organization as we become a leader in our communities making them more livable, sustainable, and economically successful for everyone. ---- Jane Sabin-Davis, Staff Director, Oregon Rural Action

### **COLIN MATHEWSON, Organizer, Blue Mountain Chapter**

It has been a pleasure to serve as an organizer to the Blue Mountain Chapter of Oregon Rural Action since September. Allow me to share a bit about myself to let you know why I've enjoyed this position so much.

From sunny suburban San Diego, where I grew up, to the suburbs of Stanford University near San Francisco, where I majored in Urban Studies, I had few early experiences with true community and connection with the land. Later, on a return to San Diego to work on a local school board political campaign, I was astonished by the amount of time and money that was invested in an effort that dissolved after election night. Through a subsequent several-month stay as a volunteer in rural El Salvador, I first began to appreciate the many blessings of living, working, sharing meals, and having fun with the same people in the same small place, working together on projects for the long-term good of the community.

I'm most recently arrived from the very urban neighborhoods of San Francisco and a daily work commute of 2 1/2 hours — perhaps now you can imagine why I've been telling my friends about my dream job out here in such beautiful country, surrounded by folks committed to building thriving communities, one step at a time!



### **DIANE PINA**

#### **Organizer, Snake River Chapter**

Diane joins our staff as a 1/2-time organizer with our Snake River Chapter. She has had extensive experience working in the Hispanic community. Diane was instrumental in developing El Centro, a multi-purpose Hispanic community center in Nyssa; additionally she worked for the Idaho Migrant Counsel as their Housing Director. More impressive than her work history is her volunteerism with community members. Diane is an active member and President of the Hispanic American Professional Woman's Association, which is dedicated to helping the Hispanic community, especially children. They hold annual events to raise funds to help families especially in the area of literacy. This all-volunteer organization services over 500 clients/year. Diane is also a long time Western Idaho, Eastern Oregon resident; she is well respected and known in this community. We are pleased to welcome Diane as the newest organizer with Oregon Rural Action.

## Second Annual Farm Direct Marketing Conference a Great Success

On Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 30 farmers, market managers, and interested community members met at Hoke Hall to learn more about growing a market garden, tips on displaying produce, employing sustainable agriculture practices by using alternatives to herbicides and pesticides, and learned about regional and international programs promoting local food.

A Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign begun in earnest this year by a Moscow, Idaho, group called Rural Roots. The campaign, being waged in at least 14 regions throughout the country, seeks to link growers who use sustainable farm practices with customers who want to buy locally-grown produce and meat — and other products, including soap and furniture. Member growers get free advertising through the Farm Fresh Buying Guide for the Inland Northwest — Eastern Oregon, Eastern Washington and Idaho.

Paul and Vicki Wares, Oregon Rural Action members from Baker City, attended the Slow Food conference in Turin, Italy and shared with participants their slides and stories about their all expense paid trip. Paul described the Slow Food movement, which was begun by Carlo Petrini when McDonalds moved to Italy, as people who are interested in appreciating the goodness of locally grown foods. The approximately 5,000 farmers and ranchers who attended the conference were housed with locals; Paul and Vicki stayed with a family that grows aromatic herbs that are used in French vermouth.

Julie Keniry, the Market Manager for the La Grande Farmers Market and Oregon Rural Action's specialist on local food, was thrilled that market managers and board members from Joseph, Pendleton, Baker City, and La Grande came together with the Oregon Farmers Market Association to brainstorm on increasing the viability of Northeast Oregon markets and producers. This collaborate effort, which could result in a statewide grant to support local markets and sponsored by Oregon Rural Action, will have a significant impact on furthering the concepts of Buy Fresh, Buy Local and Slow Food across Oregon.

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You might want to check out mortgagegreen, a financial services group that is working for you and for our planet; they recently refinanced a member's home and Oregon Rural Action received a generous donation in exchange. Ten percent of mortgagegreen's gross profits supports social and environmental causes. (Even though we are not on their website, they do donate to us, so ask!)  
[www.mortgagegreen.com](http://www.mortgagegreen.com)



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## Snake River Chapter News

Things are happening in Malheur County! We have a number of new Latino members, a Language Access Issue Campaign targeted at Probation and Parole, and a new organizer (see page 2). In December we will have a Chapter meeting to elect officers and show the movie “A Day Without a Mexican”, which tells the story of what happens when every single Latino disappears from California for a day. Intended to be a comedy, drama or fantasy, this movie helps everyone understand the importance of Latino workers to corporate and non-corporate America alike.

This month, two Latino members and an Anglo member will approach the Probation and Parole Department of Malheur County to collaborate on efforts to assure that critical information needed to understand an individual’s probation and parole requirements are made available in Spanish. There is a federal mandate that courts receiving federal funds, which include most courts in the nation, assure that Limited English Proficiency speakers can get information in their native language.

Of those completing census forms in Malheur County in the 2000 Census, 6,181 individuals or 21.1% indicated that they speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over); the national average is 17.9%. The census also asked how well does this person speak English? Nationally, 30% of the responders to this question answered the question “not well” or “not at all”. If we assume Malheur County is at least similar to the national average, this means that potentially 1,854 individuals in Malheur County answered “not well” or “not at all” to the question “how well does this person speak English”. In another census bureau document, 815 individuals in Malheur County over 18 years of age who spoke Spanish at home, spoke English less than very well. Given these statistics, our Chapter would like to ensure that the rights of the Latino citizens of Malheur County are respected and that they have a chance to “speak up for themselves.”

## What We’d Love to See: Thriving Communities (continued from Page 1)

**Food.** We will also aim to strengthen community food security by supporting the livelihoods of local farmers and ranchers who produce for local markets. Our first steps include participating in the planning of Eastern Oregon University’s Community Food Systems Conference (to be held May 7-9, 2006), and working off the local momentum it generates to establish a group willing to form a local food policy council. Such a discussion and policymaking space in the community that brings together local food producers and consumers, community nutritionists, and participants and providers in the county’s emergency food system would be an important starting point in this area.

### Community Food Security

All people at all times have access to safe, nutritious, affordable, adequate, and culturally appropriate food. All people can get their food from nonemergency sources. Food is produced, processed and distributed in ways that honor and preserve the environment and the workers who bring it to the marketplace and our tables.

*National Community Food Security Coalition*

**Get involved!** If you would like to contribute in any way to the success of these first steps described above, please contact Colin Mathewson, an organizer with Oregon Rural Action, at 975-2411 or colin@oraction.org. We look forward to celebrating our accomplishments with you very soon!